NOEL GALLAGHER KNOCKS DOWN WONDERWALL!

MOJO

The Music Magazine

180 REVIEWS
JIM MORRISON
JOHN GRANT, CAN
SLEATER-KINNEY
LUCY DACUS
& MORE

50TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL!

"I'LL NEVER BE THAT PURE AGAIN..."
JONI MITCHELL
THE REAL STORY OF *BLUE*

THE BALLAD OF BIG STAR

THE BLACK KEYS
DIG THEIR ROOTS

THE TROGGS
WILD THINGS!

SONS OF KEMET
BLACK TO THE FUTURE

REDSKINS
KICK OVER THE STATUES

ROKY ERICKSON
"HE LEFT THE PLANET. BUT HE CAME BACK!"

PLUS!
RECORD STORE DAY
THE ESSENTIAL PREVIEW

CARGO COLLECTIVE

CARGO RECORDS

MARINA ALLEN
CANDLEPOWER
FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

Stunning debut album from hugely gifted LA singer songwriter Marina Allen. A voice for our times, part Joni Mitchell, part Laura Nyro. Essential listening - these beautiful songs are reminiscent of Karen Carpenter and Fiona Apple. "A most exciting discovery" Shindig

WHITE FLOWERS
DAY BY DAY
TOUGH LOVE LP / CD

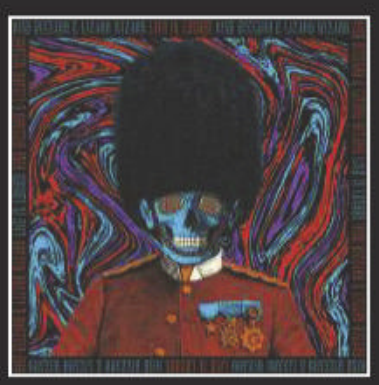
Day By Day is the dark-hued dreampop debut from Preston duo, White Flowers, recorded in an abandoned textile mill and produced with Doves' Gez Williams.

ANDY BELL
ANOTHER VIEW
SONIC CATHEDRAL CD

Compilation of the Ride singer/guitarist's three vinyl EPs, featuring seven remixes by Pye Corner Audio and acoustic versions of songs from his debut solo album 'The View From Halfway Down'.

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER
QUIETLY BLOWING IT
MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

The new album from the Grammy-nominated artist. "Vibrant Americana with emotional depth." – Q



KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD
LIVE IN LONDON '19
FUZZ CLUB 3LP BOX SET

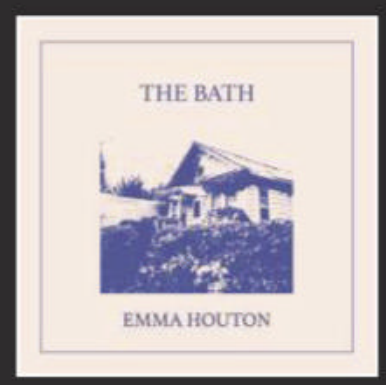
1 of 9 King Gizzard bootleg albums from Fuzz Club, this discography-spanning, triple LP box-set captures a 2019 show at Alexandra Palace. Exclusive remaster by Brett Orrison (Jack White, The Black Angels).

THE CATENARY WIRES
BIRLING GAP
SKEP WAX RECORDS LP / CD

All the melodies and harmony you'd expect from Amelia Fletcher & Rob Pursey (ex-Heavenly), but with lyrics & instrumentation that take the songs onto another level. Sophisticated pop music that takes a deep dark look at the country we live in.

CHEVAL SOMBRE
DAYS GO BY
SONIC CATHEDRAL LP / CD

Sounding like John Fahey sitting in with Spiritualized, 'Days Go By' is the second of two new Cheval Sombre albums to appear in 2021. It was produced by Sonic Boom and features guests including Dean Wareham of Galaxie 500 and Luna.



EMMA HOUTON
THE BATH
TRAPPED ANIMAL LP

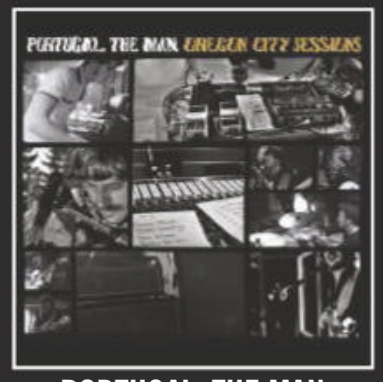
A timeless celestial vocal dream from New York City. Emma's unique tapestry leads listeners on a calming, exquisite journey. "her ambient soundscapes brim with escapism …and enchantment" Highclouds Magazine.

CULT OF DOM KELLER
THEY CARRIED THE DEAD IN A U.F.O
FUZZ CLUB RECORDS LP

British psych-rock heavyweights Cult of Dom Keller conjure dark, industrial noise on their fifth album 'They Carried The Dead In A U.F.O', out May 21st on Fuzz Club.

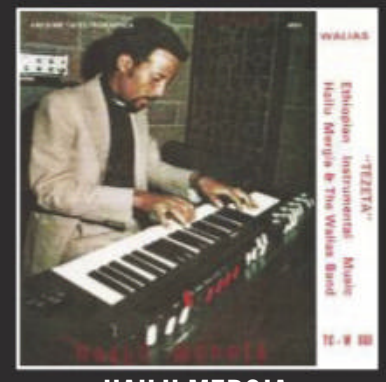
FACS
PRESENT TENSE
TROUBLE IN MIND LP / CD

Chicago trio's fourth album hones their stark, minimal scrape & clatter through post-rock, industrial, dub, and cacophonous experimental detonations.



PORTUGAL. THE MAN
OREGON CITY SESSIONS
APPROACHNG AIRBALLOONS 2LP / 2CD

A one-take live time capsule from 2008 when the young band had just completed a 2 year cycle which included an incredible 3 LPs, 1 EP, and 500 shows.



HAILU MERGIA AND THE WALIAS BAND
TEZETA
AWESOME TAPES FROM AFRICA LP / CD

Hailu Mergia and the Walias Band's relatively unknown first album Tezeta comes as a complete revelation to anyone who loves Ethiopian jazz from the so-called golden era of the mid 1970s.

LOU BARLOW
REASON TO LIVE
JOYFUL NOISE RECORDINGS LP / CD

First full length solo album since 2015's Brace the Wave. Reason to Live is shambolic and grand yet intimate and doting, warmly acoustic and crackling with grit.

FLY PAN AM
FRONTERA
CONSTELLATION LP / CD

Soundtrack to the acclaimed multi-media dance piece about borders and surveillance: the most direct, sculpted, starkly evocative music in Fly Pan Am's oeuvre, juxtaposing icy electronics and minimalist motorik avant-rock.

LORAINE JAMES
REFLECTION
HYPERDUB LP / CD

Loraine James' second Hyperdub album is a turbulent expression of inner-space, laid out in unflinching honesty, offering gentle empathy and bitter-sweet hope. 'Reflection' is a brave step forward for a unique and creative 21st century musician.

TREES
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Repress of last years sold out box set available now. 4 disc 50th anniversary edition - 12" book includes liner notes from the band and Stewart Lee. Featuring alternate mixes, early demos, BBC session tracks and live recordings.

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NOEL GALLAGHER, P28

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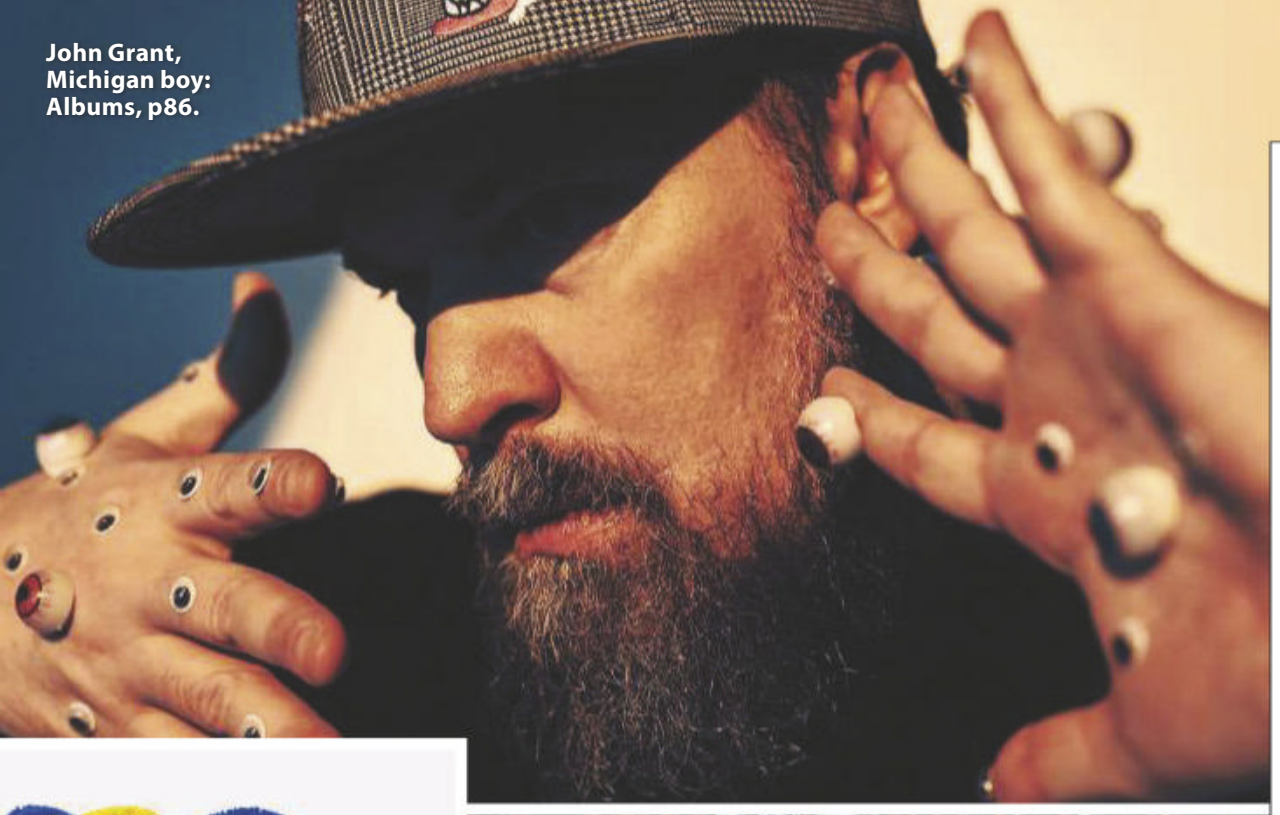
Getty



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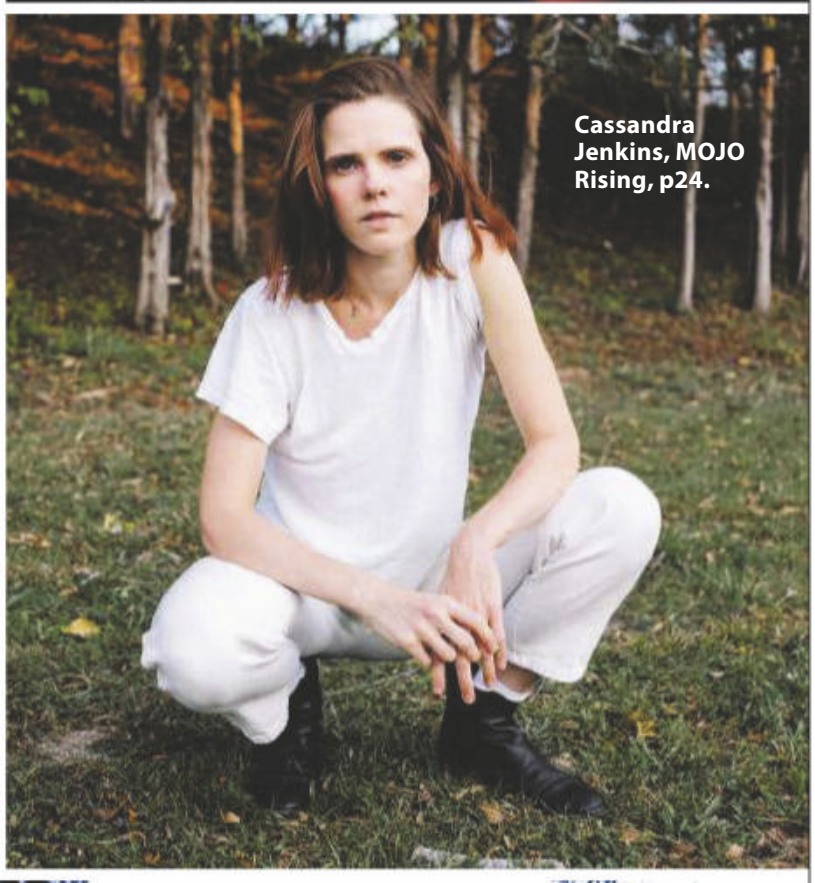

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MOJO

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18 MERRY CLAYTON She's the mighty backing voice on Gimme Shelter, Sweet Home Alabama and more. Now, rising above the most extraordinary challenges, she's back in Confidential mood to help ease our burdens.

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78 NEW ALBUMS Lucy Dacus shares her *Home Video*, plus Sleater-Kinney, John Grant, Lambchop and more.

92 REISSUES Can, very live in '75, José Mauro, Hailu Mergia & The Walias Band, Black Sabbath and more.

104 BOOKS Jim Morrison's Collected Works, plus Jayne County, Kristin Hersh, and more.

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE...

Robert Gordon

Robert is a writer and film-maker in Memphis. His books include It Came From Memphis and the Muddy Waters biography Can't Be Satisfied. Recent films include Best Before Death with Bill Drummond and Emmy-winner Best Of Enemies. His Big Star box set linernotes won a Grammy: he writes about the band on p46.

Keith Cameron

Hurrying home one evening in the winter of 1988/89, MOJO's Contributing Editor saw ex-Redskins singer Chris Dean selling Socialist Worker at Willesden Green station. Keith was halfway to his flat before realising he'd walked past a scoop, and ran back – but the commissar was gone. Keith's Redskins feature is on p36.

Ian Wright

"All my music discoveries came via the medium of radio, and still are, via the incredible growth of internet radio. Independent heavyweight champion NTS is my choice 24/7, and my ears are continually blessed. As Albert Ayler said in 1969, 'Music is the Healing Force of the Universe.'" Ian illustrates our Lead LP, p79.

Ian Wright, Trey Harrison, Wyndham Boylan-Garnett

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the BLACK KEYS present

THE HILL COUNTRY BLUES

1 JUNIOR KIMBROUGH
MEET ME IN THE CITY

Like many musicians on this comp, Kimbrough came to notice quite late in life, in the 1990s. This classic, though, dates from his first session, in Memphis in 1966. Part languid swing, part droning trance-out, "it's hypnotic music," says Carney, "to play it you have to go into some kind of primal state. If you start thinking about, you've fucking lost it."

Written by David 'Junior' Kimbrough. Published by Mockingbird Blues Publishing (BMI). Administered by Wixen Music Publishing ℗&© 2009 Big Legal Mess Records. From *First Recordings* (Big Legal Mess).

2 R.L. BURNSIDE & THE SOUND MACHINE
GOING AWAY, BABY

Recorded in 1979 by musicologist David Evans, Burnside is here joined by three sons and a son-in-law for the sort of wiry boogie that could roll on all night. "R.L. had a backbeat with his thumb like nobody else – like, wacka-wacka," explains Auerbach. "It was just so much forward momentum, it got everybody in the room moving."

Written by Jimmy Rogers. Published by Arc ℗&©Inside Sounds ℗Inside Memphis licensed by High Water Recording Company (Inside Sounds).

3 T-MODEL FORD
CUT YOU LOOSE

Pee Wee Got My Gun was a critical record in the early friendship of Auerbach and Carney and, as he reveals on page 58, the former spent time with the legendarily volatile Ford, staying overnight in his trailer. The last time Carney saw T-Model Ford was at ArthurFest in LA, 2005 – the same weekend he heard R.L. Burnside had died.

Written by James Ford. Published by Big Legal Mess Publishing Ltd. ℗&©1997 Fat Possum Records/ Epitaph. From *Pee Wee Got My Gun* (Fat Possum Records).

4 JESSIE MAE HEMPHILL
GO BACK TO YOUR USED TO BE

A pistol-packing, no-bullshit maverick, Hemphill first picked up a guitar when she was seven, in 1930, but rarely played outside private parties in Mississippi until the '80s. This low-slung '90s prowler came three years before a stroke halted her guitar-playing. "Man, I wish I could have seen her," says Dan. "She's one of my favourites."

Written by Jessie Mae Hemphill. Published by Music River ℗&©1997 Hightone Music Group. Originally released in 1990 by High Water Recording Company.

9 JAMES COTTON
COTTON CROP BLUES

A second classic from the Sun vaults, this time a 1954 cut from harmonica maestro Cotton that features – as does Junior Parker's Love My Baby – the trailblazing Pat Hare on super-distorted electric guitar. A member of Howlin' Wolf's band prior to Cotton Crop Blues, Cotton then spent a decade as Muddy Waters' bandleader, and was still recording as late as 2013. He died, aged 81, in 2017.

James Cotton – Cotton Crop Blues (Cotton). Published by Hi-Lo Music.

10 LEO 'BUD' WELCH
DON'T LET THE DEVIL RIDE

Even by the standards of the artists here, Welch started recording late: the longtime lumberjack was 81 when his first album was released in 2014. Don't Let The Devil Ride comes from a 2015 session produced by Auerbach and featuring his other band, The Arcs (including the late, great Richard Swift). It was released in 2019, two years after Welch passed on.

(Traditional) arranged by Leo 'Bud' Welch, ℗&©2019 Easy Eye Sound®. From *The Angels In Heaven Done Signed My Name* (Easy Eye Sound); http://easyeyesound.com

11 JESSIE MAE HEMPHILL
MY DADDY'S BLUES

Another cut, not unreasonably, from Hemphill's 1990 album, *Feelin' Good*. Listen out for how the lyrics embed her art as a family calling, a tradition that stretches back to her grandfather Sid Hemphill, who was recorded by Alan Lomax in the 1940s. "She had the most amazing Southern drawl, and she just wrote amazing songs," reckons Auerbach, admiringly.

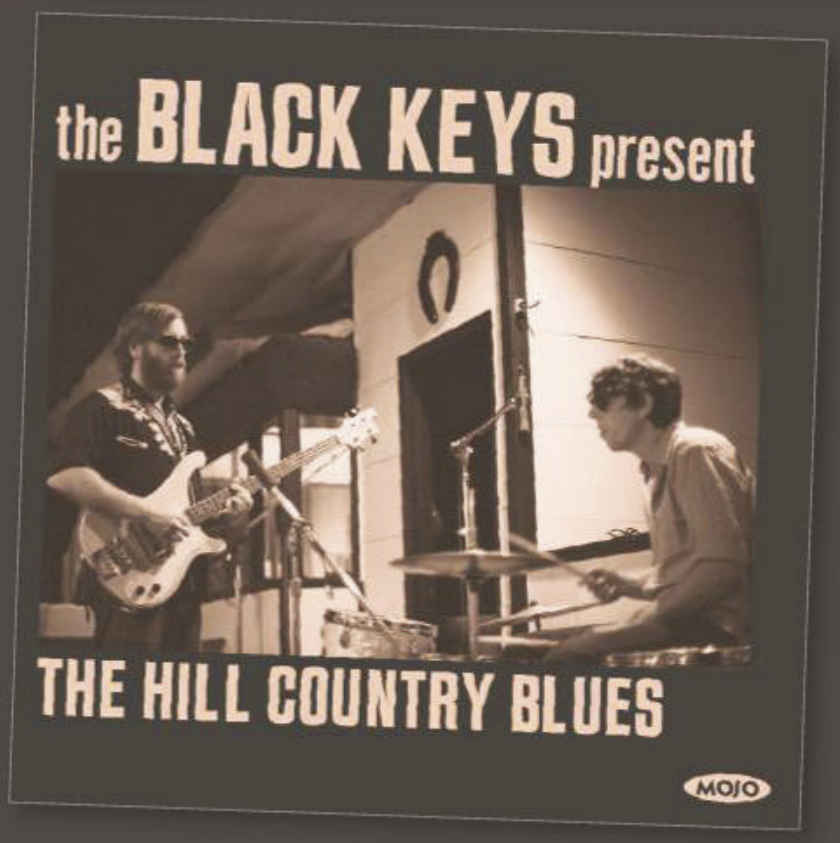
Written by Jessie Mae Hemphill. Published by Music River ℗&©1997 Hightone Music Group. Originally released in 1990 by High Water Recording Company.

12 JUNIOR KIMBROUGH
SLOW LIGHTNIN'

From the first album Kimbrough released back in 1992. Recorded in his Chulahoma juke joint, Slow Lightnin' makes clear Auerbach's comparison between him and Ali Farka Touré. "When I hear Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside," says Carney, "I hear self-taught guys channelling the energy. Blues from rural north Mississippi, [this is] all gonna be lost unless people embrace the music."

Written by David 'Junior' Kimbrough. Published by Mockingbird Blues Publishing. ℗&©1995 Fat Possum Records. From *All Night Long* (Fat Possum Records).

Getty (11), Courtesy Fat Possum Records (2), John Peets (2), Joshua Black Wilkins



WHEN DAN AUERBACH AND PATRICK CARNEY SAT DOWN TO compile this very special CD for MOJO, they were adamant it shouldn't just be a Black Keys Guide To The Blues. Instead, they wanted to be more specific, zeroing in on the propulsive throb of the Hill Country Blues, the North Mississippi sound that's been a profound influence on The Black Keys right up to their new album, *Delta Kream*. "It's music that's always resonated with me, and that we've tried to emulate," says Carney. "We learnt to play trying to play like those guys. Now when we play it, I don't feel like a re-enactor, I feel like I actually channel the energy."

Here, then, is a rollcall of heroes, programmed by Dan and Pat for long days and longer nights, for drives where the road goes on forever. "I'm definitely excited to be able to talk about some of these artists, some of these obscure records, to make this playlist," Auerbach tells us. "I like going back and making a mixtape for everybody. It's so cool."

5 MISSISSIPPI FRED McDOWELL
WRITE ME A FEW LINES

McDowell's solo magic was first caught by Alan Lomax at McDowell's home in Como, Mississippi in 1959, but Auerbach's favourite session is this one from 1964. Says Carney, "North Mississippi is lawless, insane, so impoverished but so culturally rich. It's fertile ground for weirdos to pop up, whether you're William Faulkner or Mississippi Fred."

Written by Mississippi Fred McDowell. Published by Tradition Music Co. ℗&©1989. From *You Gotta Move* (Arhoolie/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings).

6 JIMMY 'DUCK' HOLMES
CATFISH BLUES

A first appearance for The Black Keys, as Auerbach produced this set by Holmes, owner of Mississippi's oldest juke joint and last master of a local blues strain, the Bentonia school. Born in 1947, Holmes was recorded by Alan Lomax, David Evans and Fat Possum before fetching up on Auerbach's Easy Eye Sound for 2019's *Cypress Grove*.

Written by Robert Petway. Published by © Songs of Universal, Inc. (BMI), ℗&©2019 Easy Eye Sound®. From *Cypress Grove* (Easy Eye Sound); http://easyeyesound.com

7 LITTLE JUNIOR'S BLUE FLAMES
LOVE MY BABY

Originally from Coahoma County, Herman 'Junior' Parker's early sides link Mississippi blues to nascent rock'n'roll. An early collaborator of Bobby 'Blue' Bland and B.B. King, Parker was scouted by Ike Turner, before Sam Phillips snagged him for Sun. There, in 1953, Parker recorded this rowdy rockabilly twanger – and, of course, its A-side: the original version of Mystery Train.

Little Junior Parker – Love My Baby (Parker). Published by Memphis Music.

8 PAUL 'WINE' JONES
ROB & STEAL

A fervid ramalam recorded by Jones in 1995, around the time he took part in Fat Possum's 'Mississippi Juke Joint Caravan' tours. Auerbach recalls hearing how, once, "somebody told Paul that he'd done a really great show, and T-Model [Ford] took offence, thinking that he'd somehow beaten him, and he actually pulled his knife on Paul in the van, while they were driving."

Written by Paul Jones. Published by – Mockingbird Blues Publishing Ltd. ℗&©1995 Fat Possum Records. From *Mule* (Fat Possum Records).

13 R.L. BURNSIDE
MISS MAYBELLE

If Going Away, Baby showcased Burnside's electric chug, Miss Maybelle catches him solo and acoustic, drilling into the essence of Hill Country Blues. This essential version of a Burnside standard was recorded in the early '80s in Groningen, Netherlands, around the time he retired from farm work to concentrate, finally, on music.

Written by R.L. Burnside. Published by Big Legal Mess Publishing Ltd. ℗&©1984 & 1985 Swingmaster. Under exclusive license to Fat Possum Records LLC. From *Mississippi Hill Country Blues* (Fat Possum Records).

14 THE BLACK KEYS
MELLOW PEACHES

A song made famous by Burnside, hotwired by The Black Keys with the assistance of his old slide guitarist, Kenny Brown, and Junior Kimbrough's sometime bassist Eric Deaton. Recording of *Delta Kream* proved swift: "It was wild, they were so locked in," remembers Auerbach. "Kenny knew all of R.L.'s tunes, the whole repertoire."

(featuring Kenny Brown & Eric Deaton). Written by Joseph Lee Williams. Published by Testament Music c/o BMG Bumblebee (BMI), ℗&©2021 Nonesuch Records Inc. From *Delta Kream* (Nonesuch Records); nonesuch.com

15 THE BLACK KEYS
YEARNIN'

The Black Keys' 2002 debut had a necessary quota of Burnside and Kimbrough covers, but a clutch of originals too. Yearnin' showed how effectively they could fold North Mississippi blues into streamlined garage rock. "Honestly," says Auerbach, "I didn't know anybody else who even liked that shit, besides Pat. But luckily we grew up a block and a half from each other."

Written by Auerbach/Carney. Published by McMoore McLesst adm. Wixen Music Publishing. From *The Big Come Up* (Alive Naturalsound Records); www.alive-records.com

"YOU CAN'T FUCK THIS UP – IT'S *ALREADY* FUCKED UP!"

THE BLACK KEYS' BLUES AFFIRMATIONS: TURN NOW TO PAGE 58

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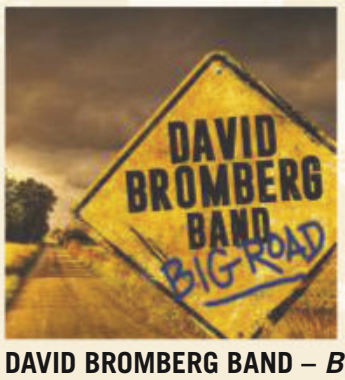
COLIN HAY – ***Going Somewhere (Limited Edition White Vinyl)***

Featuring some of Colin's best known solo work, including "Beautiful World", "Waiting For My Real Life To Begin, and "I Just Don't Think I'll Ever Get Over You," which was featured in the hit film, Garden State.

RECENT RELEASES



DAVID BROMBERG BAND – ***Big Road***

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MOLLY TUTTLE –
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ELIZA GILKYSON – ***2020***

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Eddy Grant

MAYOR OF ELECTRIC AVENUE

What music are you currently grooving to?

I'm grooving to life. There's a song called Grooving Out On Life, by **Hopeton Lewis**, out of Jamaica. It's hard though, I listen to everything. It shows the degree of swing I've got in my head. I sing, consistently, What A Wonderful World. It helps me to see things in a positive, half-full way.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

I can give you 10. Tracks Of My Tears, I Wanna Hold Your Hand, Emmerton by the **Mighty Gabby**, Say It Loud – I'm Black And I'm Proud, No Woman No Cry, live… I've got an almost encyclopaedic memory of great songs. Each one, if they were the only song left for me to listen to in perpetuity, would qualify.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing In The Shadow? I was a big **Rolling Stones** fan because they played incessant **Chuck Berry** music, which I didn't know at the time. I bought it from a guy on the Holloway Road. His name was Frank, a great guy, very decent.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Chuck Berry. I saw him at the Rainbow, Finsbury Park. A seminal meeting of souls!

What do you sing in the shower?

I don't. I may whistle Isn't She Lovely, but my mouth would be full of water, like, *blublublublub*.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

That's hard. I'd have been on-stage, in the early days… Leave that for now.

And your Sunday morning record?

I'd play Wonderful World. It will never get old, as long as there's a world.

I Belong To You is out now. See eddygrant.com for info.

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING...

Micky Dolenz

TOO MUCH MONKEE BUSINESS

What music are you currently grooving to?

Sinatra, **Billie Holiday** and **Johnny Mathis**. Billie Holiday during the day. I've always been a fan and her music was always on in my house. I've always loved Mathis, you listen to one of his records and it definitely sets a mood. Sinatra, late-afternoon for sure. Both my parents [George Dolenz and Janelle Johnson] were actors, so the music was always there. My mom sang and really whet my appetite for these amazing vocalists. My dad sang too. So, I was hooked from day one.

Jodie Cartman

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Sgt. Pepper by **The Beatles**. I don't know whatever happened to them, but what a great album. I was invited to attend a recording session for them in London and got dressed up in the best of the '60s fashion. When I got there, it was just the four of them in jeans, sitting on folding chairs in the studio, and at one point **John Lennon** pointed up to **George Martin** – in a three-piece suit – to start the playback and *Sgt. Pepper* came blaring out of the speakers. I'll never forget it.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Little Star by **The Elegants** at Wallichs Music City in Hollywood, which was the spot to go back in those days in Hollywood for your music. **Frank Zappa** worked there as a clerk, if you can imagine!

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I can't answer that.

What do you sing in the shower?

Misty. Written by **Erroll Garner** and sung by J**ohnny Mathis**.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

I'd have to go to my big three again, Sinatra, Holiday and Mathis and throw in a little **Ella Fitzgerald**. Just fantastic vocals and recordings.

And your Sunday morning record?

Something by **Andrés Segovia**. I started off playing classical guitar and he still is a big favourite.

Dolenz Sings Nesmith is out on May 21.

The Anchoress

ART ROCK UP-AND-COMER

What music are you currently grooving to?

On repeat at the moment are **Billy Nomates**' Emergency Telephone EP – which is pure groove and growl – and **Hannah Peel**'s recent *Fir Wave* album, which is like a holiday for your brain, channelling Delia Derbyshire.

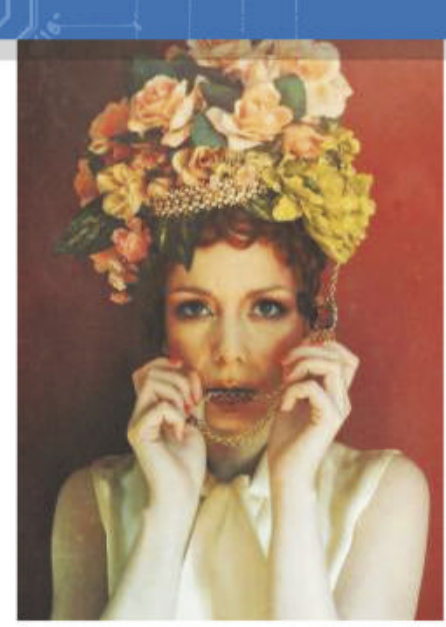
What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

If I have to pick one at gunpoint, **Kate Bush**'s *Hounds Of Love* is still a beacon of perfection for me. I still hold it up as the bar I'm trying to reach, so each and every review of my album that mentions her name makes me grin a little bit more.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

It was **Prince**'s 'symbol' album from HMV in Oxford when CDs were still really expensive, and it took me months to save up. I got the bus over there with some friends without telling my Mum. She was pretty cross. I still have the CD and play it all the time.

> "Kate Bush – a beacon of perfection."
> THE ANCHORESS



Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I don't think I have, because so many of the musicians I looked up to were men. There are lots of people whose careers I admire, of course – **David Bowie**, **Björk**, **Kate Bush**, **Scott Walker**. But I'd like to just do me.

What do you sing in the shower?

Nope! Only if I'm warming up to go on stage. I sing more in my head than out loud. I tend to save it for the studio.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

1975 – *I Like It When You Sleep…* I haven't been as excited about a band since the **Manic Street Preachers**.

And your Sunday morning record?

BBC 6Music, or something like **Nico**'s *Desert Shore* or *Scott 3* by **Scott Walker** to ease myself into the melancholia of another week beginning.

The Art Of Losing is out now.

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Theories, rants, etc.

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I'M ALWAYS A BIT SCEPTICAL WHEN people argue about what might be the finest year for music (my only-slightly sanctimonious set response: every year's great if you dig deep enough). Nevertheless, as 2021 rolls on and we tick off the albums celebrating their 50th anniversaries, it's easier and easier to understand why so many of you punt 1971 as the *annus mirabilis*. Already this year, we've marked the golden jubilees of *Tapestry*, *What's Going On*, *Déjà Vu*, *Ram* and *Maggot Brain*, testimony to the range of 1971's key albums, as well as their enduring brilliance.

This month, we head back to A&M Records in Los Angeles, just down the corridor from where Carole King is recording *Tapestry* in Studio B. Studio C is tiny, but it doesn't need to hold many musicians: mostly just Joni Mitchell, a piano, a guitar, and the songs of questing love and heartbreak that will become the most treasured of all her albums, *Blue*. These songs are small-scale, intimate, unnervingly so at times, but the story behind them takes place on a grand stage, encompassing a schooner in Jamaica, the hippy caves of Crete, jet-set parties in Ibiza, the New Mexico desert and the Isle Of Wight, and the starriest of supporting casts. "There is a certain amount of life in all my songs," Mitchell says. "If I have any personal philosophy it is that I like truth." So do we: here's the real story of one of the greatest albums of any year.

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

You're too sweet for rock'n'roll

I don't know how you do it, but you've managed to keep your high standards even with the current restrictions. MOJO 330 is no exception. As usual a stunning cover (improved for subscribers with the lack of text) and your usual high standards of design throughout. However, I must really thank you for your tribute to *What's Going On*, Marvin Gaye's trailblazing album from half a century ago. I remember being knocked out by it when Derek Jacobs, the DJ at Plymouth's seminal rock club Van Dike, first played it. It was in stark contrast to the mainly rock music that we were hearing. Still my favourite album of all time, it has lost none of its ability to move the listener deeply. It's probably an influence on the great Michael Kiwanuka, whose Mercury-winning album has the same soulful voice with great orchestrations. Takes me straight back to a time when musicians of all genres were willing to make a stand, take a chance and explore a bigger world.

Roy Perring, via e-mail

You're more important than all the silly machinery

Another MOJO, another cracking issue [MOJO 330]. Really loved the piece on Blind Willie McTell, one of my favourite Dylan songs. I once saw Martin Simpson perform the song, in tandem with the old trad song St James' Infirmary. He later explained that he believed Dylan had written the song while he was staying in St James' Hotel in London and thinking about the song St James' Infirmary. Simpson sets it out in the notes on his album *Vagrant Stanzas*, where he records his version. Dylan himself would have known Blind Willie McTell had recorded a version of the song (The Dying Crapshooter's Blues).

Gerald Cleaver, Riddlecombe, Chulmleigh

You wanna be a true friend to them? Be honest, and unmerciful

Nice Weller cover story [MOJO 331]! Though I was bemused by his slight reluctance to take the Covid

vaccine for fear of heavy metals and chemical poisons entering his body. Surely there's more of that stuff in one packet of fags? I doubt that two shots of vaccine will poison him much in comparison to the 50 years' worth of itchy smoke he has pumped into his skinny body. Anyway, long live the geezer, and y'all.

Lawrence Silver, via e-mail

I am a golden god!

Fine interview with Captain Sensible in MOJO 329 – not a bitter bone in his 66-year-old body, bless him. His recollection of the 1977 support slot The Damned undertook on tour with Marc Bolan brought back a happy memory. Four of us set out from Lowestoft in a mate's Reliant Robin van; I was one of the unlucky two lying down in the back for the 50-mile journey to West Runton Pavilion, soundtracked with Keef Hartley and Edgar Broughton tapes. Queuing outside the venue an hour before the gig, the sublime opening to Jeepster rang out and we peered through the ill-fitting drapes into the venue to see Bolan soundchecking whilst Rat Scabies and the Captain pogoed around the empty venue. A sublime moment that prefigured a wonderful gig.

Andy Betts, Leicester

I need a new crowd. Do you wanna come?

In October 2019 [MOJO 311], you ran an excellent feature about an up-and-coming south London band I'd never heard of called Black Midi. I devoured the article, fascinated by their image and range of influences, from Marvin Gaye to John McLaughlin, and by the time I'd finished I was eager to get my hands on their album, *Schlagenheim*. I just want to say a big thank you for kickstarting an obsessive love for the band that's been constant ever since. If I hadn't bought MOJO that month it's likely I still wouldn't have heard of them now – and would have missed out on many wonderful hours listening to their mind-bending blend of jazz, math-rock, prog and more, as well as a memorable concert in Brighton pre-lockdown. Here's hoping their upcoming album *Cavalcade* is just as enjoyable.

Jonathan Chadwick, London

I work just as hard or harder than anybody on that stage

Sad to hear Poco's Rusty Young has passed away. My big brother Tim took me to see Poco supporting America at the Birmingham Hippodrome in 1975. They were promoting their latest album, *Head Over Heels*, a highwater mark in '70s faded denim Cali country rock. And honestly, America must have been pig sick of Rusty and the boys blowing them off stage every night. They started off with acoustic guitars and harmonies and ended the show with Rusty, pedal steel round his neck, showboating at the edge of the stage while the rest of the band jammed on it. Rusty Young – what a legend!

Clive Goodyer, via e-mail

Some people have a hard time explaining rock'n'roll

I read with interest your Gimme Five… Laughs On Record [MOJO 331], some spontaneous, others otherwise. I give you The Colour Field's Little Things, on the double 7-inch single version of Thinking Of You. A retro-pop jaunt (Bobby Goldsboro?), I surmise the sheer ludicrousness of its jauntiness caused Terry Hall to crack up about two-thirds of the way through, followed by a just audible resignation of "oh, fucking hell", as if he'd messed up the take. Very, very far from it!

Basil Burrows, Sherwood, Nottingham

I know all about your Valhalla of decadence

Just read Theories, Rants, Etc. in MOJO 330. In the late '60s I was at Manchester Uni and set up a wake-up device in my flat. My Dansette record player was connected via a timer to the mains. On the drop-down set-up was the Edgar Broughton Band's *Wasa Wasa* record. Every morning I was awakened to Out Demons Out. It made me wake up quickly!

Steve Povey, Ulverston

What am I doing? I'm telling secrets to the one guy you don't tell secrets to

I have read MOJO since issue 1 and it's never failed to please, but in this humble reader's opinion issue 329 was the best ever. It just had the perfect blend of the old and the new – something for everyone. I won't bother to pick any one article out as they were all superb, as was the standard of the writing – as I'm guessing the majority of your readers will agree. Here's to the next 329 issues! And by the way, although I haven't got the space to keep all the back issues, I do have virtually all of the CDs, which have also provided a great cross-section of music over the years and have led to me buying music by artists I wouldn't otherwise have heard of: job well done!

Colin Williamson, Beckenham

I have to go home…

Just reading Dan Wolff's letter in MOJO 330: "I'm sure gigs won't ever be taken for granted again." As a music lover and avid reader over a lifetime of NME, Melody Maker, Sounds and MOJO, I have a small/big confession to make – I have never enjoyed going to see a band live. Is there something wrong with me? I'd rather sit in a room on my own and listen to their recorded output. It would be nice to know I'm not alone. Phew! Glad I got that off my chest!

Steve Gould, Taunton

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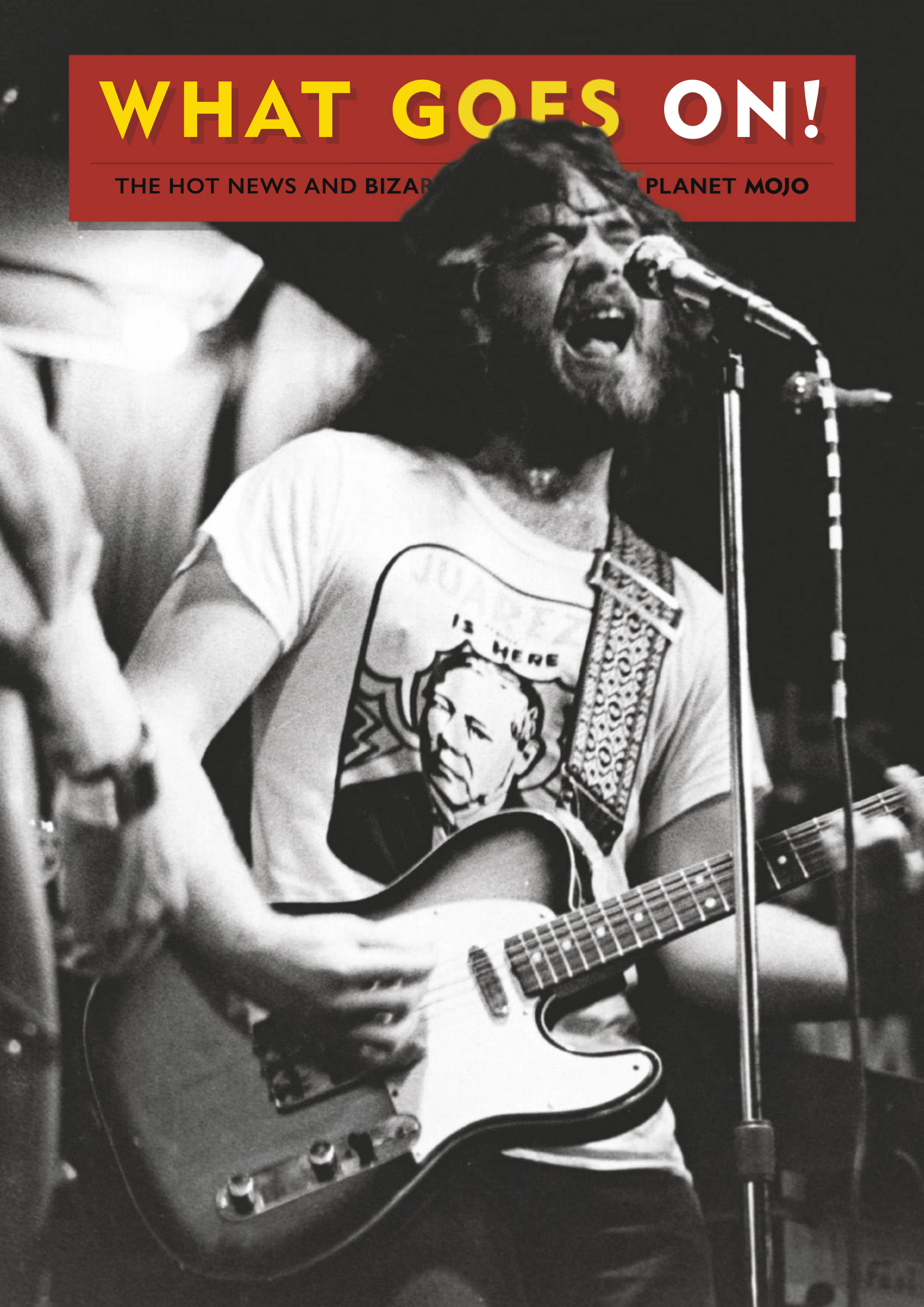
WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZAR PLANET MOJO



He has always been here before: (main) Roky Erickson performs Red Temple Prayer (Two-Headed Dog) live with Doug Sahm in Texas in 1978 (Waylon Jennings also appeared on-stage that night); (below) late-period Roky; homage payers Lucinda Williams (above) and (top) Charlie Sexton (left) and Billy F Gibbons.

Themes From Roky

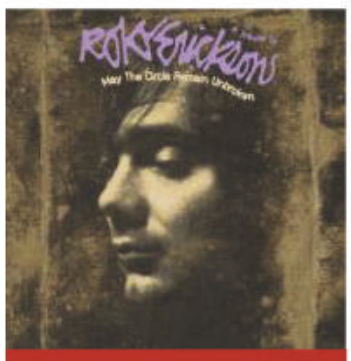
A new **Roky Erickson** tribute album, with **Billy F Gibbons**, **Lucinda Williams**, **Jeff Tweedy** and more!

"BACK IN January '66 when I first saw The 13th Floor Elevators, I'd never seen a band as strong," says Austin, Texas writer and producer Bill Bentley. "Their music gave a lyrical reality to what I was looking for – it was like the Bible, it taught me something about another world that was real. I've searched for that in everything since then."

Heady claims for a band – usually. But when it comes to the still-strobing legacy of Roky Erickson and his band of psychedelic kamikazes, all rhetorical norms are suspended. In 1990, Bentley was behind the Roky covers album *Where The Pyramid Meets The Eye*, when ZZ Top, Julian Cope, R.E.M. and more paid homage and raised funds for the embattled singer and songwriter, whose mental health struggles were ongoing. Bentley's new set, *May The Circle Remain Unbroken: A Tribute To Roky Erickson*, was sparked at a San Francisco show in April 2019, when Erickson reprised the Elevators' 1967 classic *Easter Everywhere* in full. He died a month later.

"I saw him struggling to breathe between songs," says Bentley of his friend. "I saw that Roky's time on earth was over. And what the Elevators taught me was, that's not the end of things. That night in 2019, I said, I've got to do another tribute record to Roky. There are several generations that are new to him, and maybe we can show them what he and the Elevators did."

Whereupon Bentley, who has also helmed similar love-ins for Skip Spence and Doug Sahm, put the word out. The result is a heartfelt salute to Roky's writing, from third-eye dilating Elevators faves and by-demons-driven solo work to beauteous meditations on love and oneness, with contributors including Jeff Tweedy, Gary Clark Jr, Chelsea Wolfe, Ty Segall, Mark Lanegan and Mosshart Sexton, AKA Alison Mosshart and Charlie Sexton.



"I've never seen an artist go as far out mentally as Roky and still survive."
BILL BENTLEY

The latter musician, an Austin guitarist who plays for Bob Dylan, speaks for them all when he tells MOJO, "When Bill called me about it, I said, Cool, of course I want to do it for Roky. It was strange and daunting and fun."

Sexton first met Erickson in Austin when he was a kid in the late '70s, and recalls Roky, in satin bell-bottoms and matching shirt with a captain's cap, coming back to the family home to sleep on the couch. He smoked so many cigarettes they thought the house was on fire. He remembers a man who was much more than a sufferer of schizophrenia.

"Roky had that sparkle in his eye," says Sexton. "He really worked on his songs. He had, obviously, the situation that he was in, but was very clever too, very funny, and he really was sweet. He'd do certain things, and play off that kooky thing, you know? You'd catch the corner of his eye and he'd be looking at you, like, 'Ha Ha!' You know?"

Sexton and Mosshart bring a beatific recreation of Starry Eyes to the party; other standouts include Williams' feral revisiting of You're Gonna Miss Me, Billy F Gibbons' flashback to Levitation ("He went out of his way to learn how to do jug parts on guitar!" says Bentley. "That's intense!") and Margo Price's roadhouse gothic creepy-crawl around Red Temple Prayer (Two-Headed Dog).

"I've never seen an artist go as far out mentally as Roky and still survive," muses Bentley. "He kind of left the planet. But he came back. My mission now is to get a statue in Austin for him, next to Stevie Vaughan. The two albums are 30 years apart which means I'll be 100 when I do the next one! In one form or another, we'll still be here, right? So let's do it, man!"

Ian Harrison

May The Circle Remain Unbroken: A Tribute To Roky Erickson gets a Record Store Day vinyl release on July 17. A CD will follow.

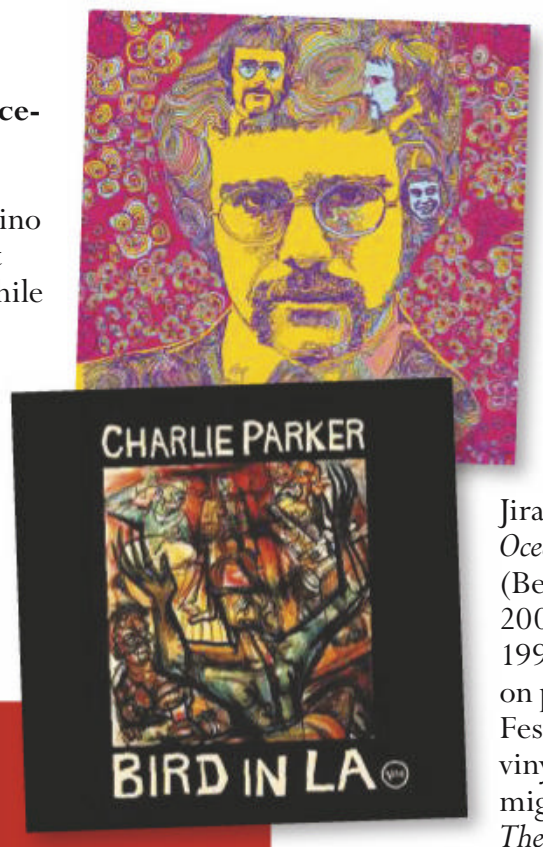
Craig Luckin, Todd Wolfson, Getty, Alamy

RECORD STORE DAY IS HERE! BUT WHAT'S ON THE RACKS?

RECORD shops have always been a vital part of MOJO readers' lives, every one of them essential exchange points for sustaining music, info and vibes. This June 12's global Record Store Day, joyously, they will be open for business again. But, when you stop by, say Spillers Records in Cardiff, or New York's Downtown Music Gallery, from 8am sharp, which limited one-off exclusives will you be looking out for?

Albums-that-never-were get their freaky, unreal due this year. Before **Elton John**'s 1969 debut *Empty Sky*, he had an album called *Regimental Sgt. Zippo* (Mercury) ready to go: finally incarnated on vinyl, this RSD edition features some songs heard on 2020's *Jewel Box*, five "finished" versions, and the first non-bootleg release of You'll Be Sorry To See Me Go. **Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers**' *Angel Dream* (Warners), meanwhile, is "a remixed, remastered and re-imagined" version of 1996's *She's The One*: intriguingly, *Angel Dream* will replace its predecessor in the catalogue. Also new to the 12-inch racks are **Prince**'s 1998 acoustic set *The Truth* (CMG), single-album box set selection **Joni Mitchell**'s *Archives Vol. 1* (Rhino) and **Marc Bolan & T.Rex**'s *Star King* (Demon), which collects 'working' takes of familiar tracks.

There's more tape archaeology on **Johnny Paycheck**'s *Uncovered: The First Recordings* (Lightning Rod), which collects the intense country hardman's early '60s demos, recorded while he was playing bass in George Jones's band. **The Replacements**' *The Pleasure's All Yours: Pleased To Meet Me Outtakes & Alternates* (Rhino Warner) gives a different view of their 1987 LP, while **Richard Hell And The Voidoids**' sign-off LP can be heard in protean form on *Destiny Street Demos* (Omnivore). Underground listeners will want **The Residents**' *Leftovers Again?!?* (Ralph), which compiles 16 unreleased oddities from the '70s, including an alternative version of Satisfaction.



"Charlie Parker's *Bird In LA* boasts the complete recording of "the infamous July 1952 'naked party'"

In the unheard live LP section, the four-album **Charlie Parker** – *Bird in LA* (Verve) boasts performances from 1945, 1948 and the complete recording of "the infamous July 1952 'naked party'" at the Los Angeles home of artist Jirayr Zorthian. **Dirty Three**'s *Ocean Songs: Deluxe Boxset* (Bella Union) adds the group's 2005 performance of their 1998 album, with Nick Cave on piano, at the New York ATP Festival, on blue and violet vinyl. The **Grateful Dead**'s mighty six-album *Olympia Theatre, Paris, France 5/3/72* (RBDO 2171) contains the whole show with a special etching on side 12, while **Keith Richards**' red vinyl 7-inch Wicked As It Seems/Gimme Shelter (live) (BMG) brings two unreleased recordings.

It's not all about the unheard, of course. Getting their first represses since release are **Dennis 'Blackbeard' Bovell**'s *I Wah Dub* (PLG UK Catalog), **Jonathan Richman**'s *Having A Party With Jonathan Richman*

United Archives/Roba Archive/Bridgeman Images, Getty

RSD trippers: (clockwise from above) in Chicago's Shuga Records, April 2019; releases by Jerry Dammers, ELP, The Coterie, Charlie Parker and Elton John; rival completists in Hamburg ring round to get that Bardo Pond rarities LP.

(Concord/Craft), R&B singer **James Ray**'s sole, self-titled LP from 1962 (Vinyl Revival) and, on splatter vinyl, Dublin hippies **The Coterie**'s super-rare 1969 LP *A Swing To Folk* (Munster). Also re-available for less than the hundreds of quid you'd normally pay are the eponymous 1969 psych blues LP *Jaklin* (Morgan Blue Town), **Carla Whitney**'s 1975 LP *Choker Campbell & The Super Sounds* (Attic) and a 7-inch of **Ike & Tina Turner**'s Bold Soul Sister/ Somebody (Somewhere) Needs You (Selector Series), the latter a Frank Wilson-penned Northern soul fave.

Up for some coloured vinyl? Sober reason alone cannot explain the appeal of a bright yellow remaster of **The Rolling Stones**' *Hot Rocks* (UMC), a 'turquoise & cream' pressing of **Toots & The Maytals**' *Funky Kingston* (Get On Down) or a 'Crystal Clear' edition of **Poly Styrene**'s *Translucence* (PLG UK), but who's complaining? Similarly, eye-catching editions of **The Who**'s *Face Dances* (yellow and blue, UMC), **Black Sabbath**'s *Master Of Reality* (purple, BMG) and **Bert Jansch**'s *Black Swan* (silver, Earth Recordings) will mesmerise revolving at 33rpm, as will picture discs including **The Kinks**' *Percy* (BMG), the **Motörhead/Girlschool** St Valentine's Day Massacre EP (on 10-inch, BMG), **Janis Joplin**'s *Pearl* (CMG), **ELP**'s *Tarkus* (BMG), and **The Cure**'s *Faith* (Elektra). There's much more that cries out to be snapped up, of course: the five 45s of the **Elastica** *Singles* box (Rough Trade), for example; **The Flaming Lips**' silver vinyl *The Soft Bulletin Companion* (Warner), the **Miles Davis** *Champions: Rare Miles From The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions* yellow LP (Legacy) or **Warpaint**'s *The Fool/Andrew Weatherall Sessions* (Rough Trade), where the late Lord Sabre's full album remix makes it to expanded wax.

After all that excitement, there's another RSD "drop" on July 17: tempting releases already confirmed include **The Heartbreakers**' *L.A.M.F. – The Found '77 Masters* (Jungle). The original got a faulty mastering job, but after a tape called 'Copy Master 12.7.77' was – we quote – "found in an attic" last year, it can finally be heard as intended in a limited transparent purple edition. Also pending are **Jerry Dammers**' At The Home Organ: Demos 1980-82 (10-inch, 2 Tone), the first vinyl pressing of **Ann Peebles**' *This Is Ann Peebles* since 1969 (Fat Possum), the first 7-inch vinyl release of the **Vince Guaraldi Trio**'s Baseball Theme from Peanuts (Concord/Craft), with an alternate take on the B-side, and a commercial release for 1981 **Clash** interview LP *If Music Could Talk* (CMG). Add **Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young**'s *Déjà Vu Alternates* (Rhino Atlantic), plus live LPs from **John Prine**, **Ramones**, **Aretha Franklin** and more, and, truly, we are spoiled. Just remember, if your record isn't in stock, what about all the records that are? Good hunting, vinyl junkies.

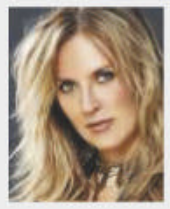
Ian Harrison

See recordstoreday.co.uk for more info. Support your local record shop!

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Liz Phair

The Guyville Exile recalls **Yazoo**'s *You And Me Both* (Mute 1983)

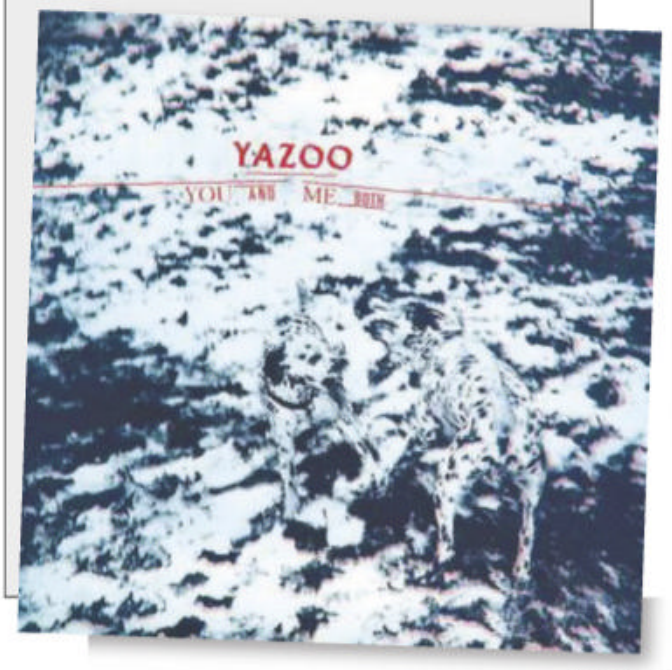


The first album that made me feel like a woman, not a girl. I listened to that tape in my Walkman every day in junior year of high school. I'd huddle over my drawings in art class, sketching angular faces and figures to the spare rhythms of Yaz (the group changed their name in North America). "I can be anywhere. I can be anyone." The year? Autumn, 1983. The music? Oh, it was very modern. I had to flip the cassette over halfway to listen to the second side. *You And Me Both* was the Rosetta Stone that taught me how to handle men. Alison Moyet's throaty, urgent vocals helped me embrace my new, curvy, female body, promised that I, too, would have secrets and drama. "Hey baby, don't walk away from love! Tell me, baby, ain't my love enough?"

I was surprised my boyfriend at the time was willing to listen to my favourite music. *You And Me Both* is a classic of female empowerment. But guys loved it. Moyet is confrontational, flippant, but also fiercely loyal. She seduces you while slapping you across the face. "Don't mind me, honey, I'm just looking. Smelt your chicken and I watched you cooking. Souped up, jacked up, cracked up, stacked up. You're a bad stain and you need to be cleaned up!" He never missed a chance to point out one half of the band used to be in Depeche Mode.

Sixteen was an age of contradictions: love that burned hot and cold, surrounded by friends yet feeling miserably alone. Vince Clarke's staccato synths paired with Moyet's warm, sustaining vibrato echoed our inner turmoil. We were crackling with novel impulses but a deep part of us still cried out for approval. It wasn't until the end of the party when everyone was already drunk and Yaz came on that we confessed our deepest feelings. Arms around each other, we sang: "Ah, Mr Blue. I'm here to stay with you and no matter what you do, when you're lonely, I'll be lonely, too."

Liz Phair's Soberish is out June 4 on Chrysalis.



Still great when he's straight: Ryder returns.

SHAUN RYDER FINISHES HIS 'DELUSIONAL, SGT PEPPER'S', WORKS WITH NOEL G. AND LEE PERRY

"I'VE REALLY liked my lockdown," says Shaun Ryder from home in Greater Manchester. "I've got a little studio at the bottom of the garden. I don't have to go anywhere and get myself in trouble."

He spent Covid seclusion finishing *Visits From Future Technology*, his first solo album since 2003. It was, remarkably, begun in the late noughties. Recorded in Manchester and Venice Beach with producer Sunny Levine – grandson of Quincy Jones and son of producer Stewart Levine – it was put on hold when Ryder went on jungle reality TV show I'm A Celebrity… Get Me Out Of Here! in late 2010. Impressing the public with his steady humours and willingness to eat cockroaches and crocodile penis, he came second, emerged with profile enhanced, and busied himself with telly, as well as Happy Mondays and Black Grape reunions.

But he was always keen to make new music. "It's what I do, so I was always up for it," he says. "But the management I had weren't interested, and no one would put it out, so it just got left. Then, during this Covid madness, it got rediscovered. I remembered what a great time we had making it and how good it was. You'd be amazed if you knew who was playing the saxophone, the drums and guitars, they're that famous we're not saying. So we played with it, touched it up and tickled it, brought a few things out, and did some new vocals."

Work on the album, which combines rock, hip-hop, indie pop and grooves with Ryder's cracked narrations, was finally done in March 2021. He says sobriety and his late ADHD diagnosis haven't much affected his creative process: "I'm a lot more sober, but it's still the same stuff I always wrote about – nonsense and mumbo jumbo. Being ADHD, I'm still 21 in my head. I've still got a comic strip brain. Apart from not being full of heroin and cocaine, it's not made that much difference to my personality. When I've got the music going and I can hear the beats, I can write. The song Mumbo Jumbo – 'I've got 75 per cent jellyfish textses' – what the fuck is that? It starts with the rise and fall of Top Of The Pops and you build the words around that. So it's still me."

Since hitting 50, he says he's suffered panic attacks, an underactive thyroid and a hip replacement, but he sounds swearily hearty and is keen to do live shows. He's also been busy guesting on other peoples' records. "The amount of stuff I've fucking done from our house during the fucking Covid," he says. "Tricky, one with Noel [Gallagher], Robbie Williams, Lee Perry, they're all waiting to come out. I'm about to start doing a new Black Grape album too. But I won't do another Happy Mondays album the way Paul Ryder [bass] or Gaz Whelan [drums] want to work, unless it gets done the way I wanna do it. Mark [Day, guitar] is a dream, though."

He adds that 2003 Ryder album *Amateur Night In The Big Top*, recorded in Australia, should be treated with scepticism.

"I'd arrived heavily sedated on heroin, valium, methadone, you fucking name it," he says. "It was just something that I did 'cos I was turkeying my tits off and I was trying to stay focused. To me, this is my first solo album."

Ian Harrison

Mumbo Jumbo is released as a single on June 25, followed by Popstar's Daughters on July 23. Album re-order: /shaunryder.tmstor.es/

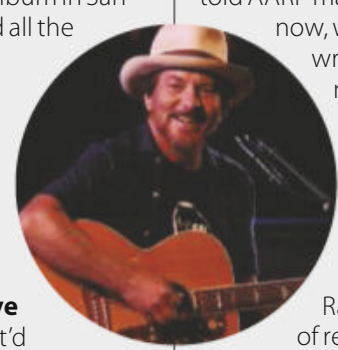
> **"I'm still 21 in my head. I've still got a comic strip brain."**
> **SHAUN RYDER**

FACT SHEET

Title: *Visits From Future Technology*
Due: August
Songs: Mumbo Jumbo/ Straighten Me Up/ Turn Off The Air/ I Can Stop Anytime
The Buzz: "Basically, you know the way *Sgt. Pepper's* has got all kinds of different tunes on it? It's sort of something like that, with loads of different types of tracks. In my delusional, ADHD brain, it's sort of *my Sgt. Pepper's*… but not." *Shaun Ryder*

ALSO WORKING

…speaking to his Apple Music show Rocket Hour, **ELTON JOHN** revealed he's been working with **Metallica** and **Gorillaz**. "I haven't been doing any Elton stuff, but I've been doing great stuff with other people" … **METALLICA**'s **Kirk Hammett**, meanwhile, appears on *Blessings And Miracles*, one of three new LPs in the works from **Carlos Santana** (left). "All the notes are really, really juicy and powerful," Santana told Australia's ABC radio …Mersey cult **Paul Simpson** is preparing a new album by **The Wild Swans**. *Flowers Of Sulphur* was recorded with help from **Marty Willson-Piper** of **The Church**, **The Brian Jonestown Massacre**'s **Ricky Maymi** and **Edgar Jones**: titles include Lucifer's Childhood and Witchcraft …**EARTHLESS** have been recording a fifth studio album in San Diego. "We have finished all the tracking, overdubs and seasonings," they said. "It's been a blast" … **SOFT CELL** have recorded 20 songs for a new LP, out early next year. "The new songs are still catchy, but a lot more worldly-wise," **Dave Ball** told the Daily Star. "It'd be inappropriate for two 60-something men to try to write bouncy little pop numbers" …**STING** told AARP magazine, "I'm in the studio now, writing new songs, writing about who I am now. They're coming slowly but surely. I never panic" …**Stone Gossard** discussed new **PEARL JAM** (left) music with **Anne Erickson** of Audio Ink Radio. "We're always kind of recording and doing stuff. So, it wouldn't surprise me if we did some more recording…"



Getty (2), Paul Husband

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THU	03	STOCKTON GLOBE
SAT	05	LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC HALL
SUN	06	BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
TUE	08	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CLIFFS PAVILION
WED	09	IPSWICH REGENT THEATRE
FRI	11	LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
SAT	12	GUILDFORD G LIVE
MON	14	MANCHESTER BRIDGEWATER HALL
TUE	15	CARDIFF ST DAVID'S HALL
THU	17	OXFORD NEW THEATRE
FRI	18	BATH THE FORUM

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SOLD OUT	**BRIGHTON**	CENTRE
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"I'm not gonna sing that!" Clap hands, here comes Merry Clayton.

Mathieu Bitton

MERRY CLAYTON

The Gimme Shelter belter talks serendipity, disability and redemption.

IN 2013'S OSCAR-winning documentary, 20 Feet From Stardom, Merry Clayton and a handful of top-flight backing singers from rock'n'soul's golden age were finally thrust into the limelight, to huge acclaim. Following the movie's release, its stars, who also included Darlene Love, Lisa Fischer and Gloria Jones, were planning a world tour when Clayton suffered a car accident in Los Angeles, and had to have both legs amputated at the knee. Incredibly, this battling spirit – palpable in her scorching contributions to The Rolling Stones' Gimme Shelter, Lynyrd Skynyrd's Sweet Home Alabama and Carole King's *Tapestry*, among many other credits – now strikes back with her seventh solo album, *Beautiful Scars*. But don't dare to call hers a hard-luck story.

Is *Beautiful Scars* Merry Clayton taking it back to church?

It's just me wanting to do some music that's gonna help people, and let them know they can make it, with all this pandemic madness we're going through.

It must have been a long road back for you, to get singing again.

It was a bit of a long road, but I'm a very positive person, and I take everything with love, and with gratitude. Let me tell you something, honey, I was glad I could look in a mirror and see myself, that I wasn't messed up in my face. Here I had some issues (*points downwards*) but I was alive! When the doctor came to break the news to me in hospital, apparently I looked at him and asked, "Did anything happen to my voice?" He said, "No", and I just started to sing. I knew that if my gift was still intact, I would be fine.

You discovered that gift in church, when you were growing up in New Orleans.

Yes, when I was four. My daddy was a preacher, and Mahalia Jackson was a family friend. When she was in town, she would come to church on Sunday morning, and I would nestle next to her. When she got up to sing, I'd stand up on the pew and mimic everything she did.

After serving in Ray Charles' Raelettes, you were expecting your first child in November '69 when the Stones called.

When Jack Nitzsche called, I was getting ready to go to bed, had rollers in my hair, with pink silk pyjamas on. I was stomping, not wanting to do it, a bunch of drama, but when we finally got to the studio, here comes Mick and Keith, (*fruity Mockney*) "Oooooh, hello darlin'!" We did the first pass together – Mick, Keith and I. Then they wanted me to sing, "Rape, murder, it's just a shot away…". I said, "Look, I'm here by myself, I'm not gonna sing that!" Then, I'm telling you, something came over me. At that time, we had racism, police shootings – the same thing we have now – so I did the next pass screaming to the top of my voice, it was like I was screaming to my ancestors, "Please just give us shelter", and I had tears coming down from my eyes. I gave them one more for safety, then I was gone. Three passes.

Did you ever wish you could've sung it every night on-stage with the Stones, as did your 20 Feet co-star, Lisa Fischer?

You can only want a job that somebody wants you to have. Lisa is my dear friend, and I was fine with it. I was doing my own records, and I would guest-artist with Art Garfunkel, or Aretha. I was the star of the background singers, the one they called all the time, and I made a great living. I was able to put my sons through school and I still have a gorgeous, luxurious home, paid for, so to me, I was cool. Even after the accident, I've never said, "Woe is me!" That's not the way I roll.

Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before…

I am secretly a great actress! I did Cagney & Lacey. When I read for the part, my son Kevin, who went to the Strasberg school, said, "Mom, when you start, just treat it like the first verse of a song, and you'll be fine." I was the last one they saw, after 200 real actresses, and when I left, all the directors and producers were on the floor.

Andrew Perry

Beautiful Scars is out now via Motown Gospel.

MAKE MERRY

Clayton's Big Five

1. **Al Green** *Let's Stay Together* (HI, 1971)
2. **Beyoncé** *Halo* (COLUMBIA/MUSIC WORLD, 2008)
3. **Carole King** *Beautiful* (A&M, 1971)
4. **Billy Preston** *You Are So Beautiful* (A&M, 1974)
5. **Ray Charles** *Eleanor Rigby* (ABC, 1968)

"It was like I was screaming to my ancestors…"
MERRY CLAYTON

THE CHARLATANS

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29 BEXHILL
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30 BOURNEMOUTH O2 ACADEMY
DECEMBER
02 OXFORD O2 ACADEMY
03 CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE
04 MANCHESTER
O2 VICTORIA WAREHOUSE
06 LINCOLN ENGINE SHED
08 LIVERPOOL
INVISIBLE WIND FACTORY
09 NEWCASTLE O2 CITY HALL
10 LONDON
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SOLD OUT	27	Glasgow Barrowland Ballroom
Mon	29	Newcastle O2 Academy
Tue	30	Sheffield O2 Academy

December 2021

Wed	01	Hull City Hall
SOLD OUT	03	Liverpool O2 Academy
SOLD OUT	04	Leicester O2 Academy
Mon	06	Norwich UEA
Tue	07	Cambridge Corn Exchange
Thu	09	Birmingham O2 Academy
SOLD OUT	10	Nottingham Rock City
SOLD OUT	11	Manchester Academy
Mon	13	Oxford O2 Academy
Tue	14	Brighton Dome
Thu	16	Bristol O2 Academy
EXTRA DATE ADDED DUE TO DEMAND		
Fri	17	London Roundhouse
Sat	18	London Roundhouse
Mon	20	Leeds O2 Academy
Tue	21	Leeds O2 Academy
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Wed	22	Manchester Academy

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14 Southend - *Cliffs Pavilion*
15 Nottingham - *Royal Concert Hall*
17 Blackpool - *Opera House*
18 York - *Barbican*
20 Manchester - *Bridgewater Hall*
21 Sheffield - *City Hall*
22 Newcastle - *O2 City Hall*

October 2021
11 Hamilton - *Townhouse*
12 Aberdeen - *Music Hall*
13 Inverness - *Ironworks*
14 Perth - *Concert Hall*
15 Dunoon - *Queens Hall*
16 Oban - *Corran Halls*
18 Birmingham - *Symphony Hall*
19 Southampton - *Guildhall*
20 London - *Palladium*

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19 ~~Glasgow~~ SOLD OUT - *Barrowland**
20 ~~Glasgow~~ SOLD OUT - *Barrowland*
21 Glasgow - *Barrowland* EXTRA DATE - JUST ANNOUNCED

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SUN 31 LIVERPOOL EMPIRE

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FRI 05 CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE
SAT 06 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA
MON 08 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
TUE 09 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
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FRI 12 BRIGHTON CENTRE
SAT 13 BOURNEMOUTH INTL CENTRE
MON 15 OXFORD NEW THEATRE
TUE 16 LLANDUDNO VENUE CYMRU THEATRE
THU 18 NEWCASTLE O2 CITY HALL
FRI 19 HARROGATE CONVENTION CENTRE
SAT 20 EDINBURGH USHER HALL
MON 22 STOKE REGENT THEATRE
TUE 23 LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
WED 24 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL
FRI 26 HULL BONUS ARENA
SAT 27 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
SUN 28 BLACKBURN KING GEORGES HALL
TUE 30 HALIFAX VICTORIA THEATRE

DECEMBER 2021
WED 01 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
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Sun 10 **Brighton** *Chalk*
Thu 14 **Bristol** *O2 Academy*
Fri 15 **Manchester** *Cathedral*
Sat 16 **Newcastle** *Boiler Shop*
Sun 17 **Glasgow** *Barrowlands*
Thu 21 **Birmingham** *O2 Institute*
Fri 22 **Leeds** *University Stylus*
Sat 23 **Liverpool** *O2 Academy*
Sun 24 **Cardiff** *Tramshed*

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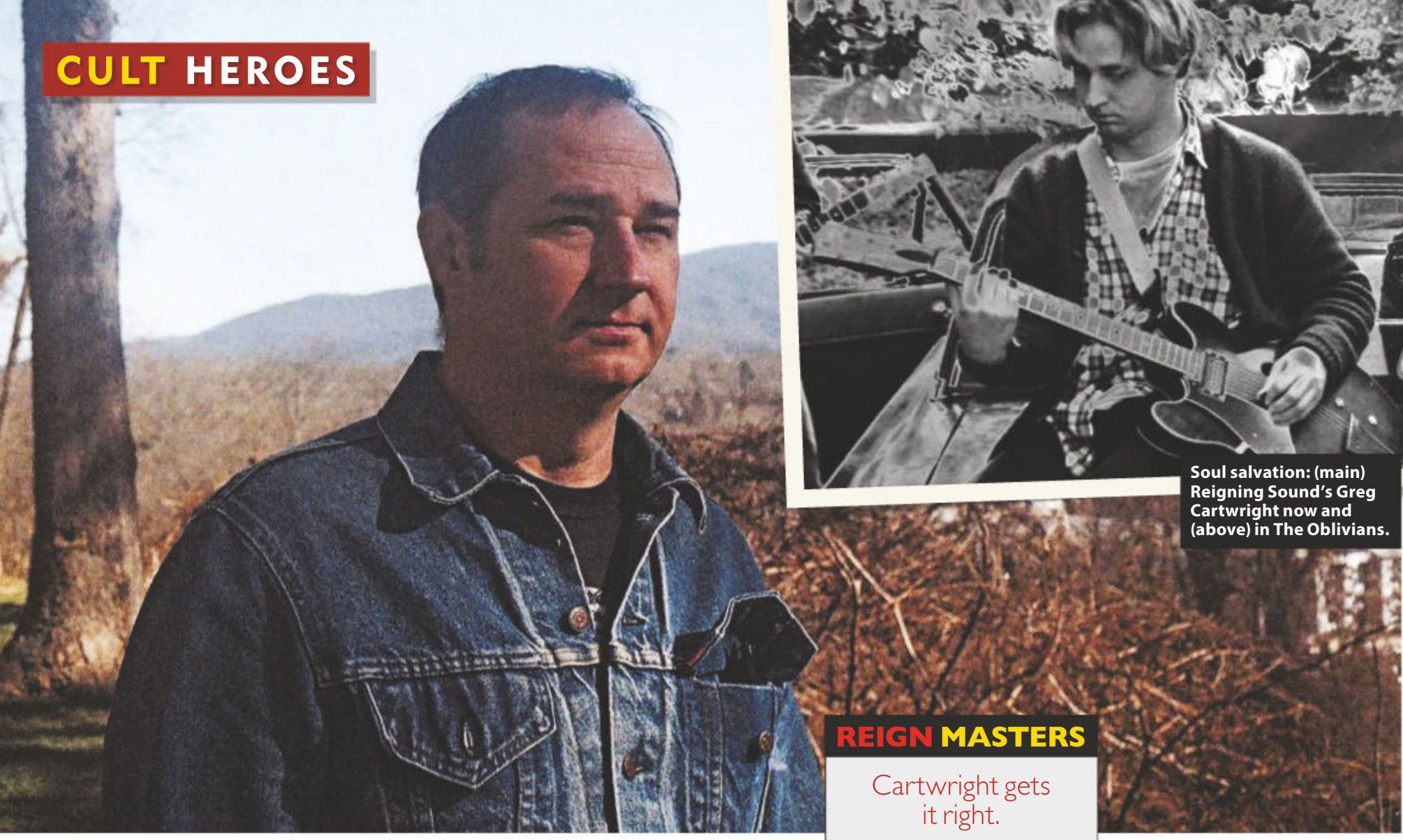


Soul salvation: (main) Reigning Sound's Greg Cartwright now and (above) in The Oblivians.

FIRE UP THE COUNTRY, ROCK AND SOUL WITH REIGNING SOUND

"THERE WAS a reason I always ran away from success," says Reigning Sound mainman Greg Cartwright from his home in Asheville, North Carolina. "I've seen what it can to do people, and it really did kind of terrify me. Really, I'm at the level where I would like to be."

That level moves at his own pace. He hasn't made a Reigning Sound record since 2014: in the interim he's worked at a local guitar showroom, been "the 45s guy" at the city's Harvest record shop, hosted his own local radio shows and got on with raising his three kids. There's also been self-examination (more of which later). But this group is worth waiting for: out this month, *A Little More Time With Reigning Sound* is, as ever, a Memphis affair, wedding vintage rock'n'roll, soul and country moves with a masterful, perceptive songcraft. It hatched when Cartwright's first dates with the group's original line-up for years coincided with a sudden spurt of writing and the pandemic hitting.

"That the dynamic was still there," says Cartwright. "The possibility of making a record with those guys made me want to make a record, shall we say."

A vinyl collector since he was six, Cartwright was raised in Memphis, and lists Bowie, the British Invasion and Nilsson among his early turn-ons. As a 16-year-old punk, an encounter with Tav Falco's Panther Burns opened his mind to the blues, rockabilly and other roots sounds. His first group was the Compulsive Gamblers, though from '93 he made more impact with down-and-dirty garage primitivists The Oblivians, who were tipped for the kind of success enjoyed by The White Stripes in the early noughties.

Yet all was not well. "In The Oblivians, there was a lot of irony, raciness and costumes being put on," says Cartwright. "I was happy when it ended because it required me to let a very damaged part of myself be in charge. The label now owns that material. It's like you made a bad joke and you can't scrub it away. Someone else insists on it still being out there for everyone to hear."

He was already heading into more reflective, adult directions with next project Reigning Sound. Kicking off with *Break Up... Break Down* in 2001, a modest but potent discography followed. Through discs including 2011's Dan Auerbach-produced *Abdication... For Your Love* and 2007's Cartwright-helmed Mary Weiss LP *Dangerous Game*, past American forms were revisited with truth but never parodic intent (for a glowing example, see the sweetly heartsick Never Coming Home from 2014's *Shattered*). "The melody is just as important as the lyric," says Cartwright of his methods. "When I've said something I need to say and the hook is gonna hit just the right spot... you can just feel it when you do it right."

Compared to the melancholy of earlier releases, one of the most striking aspects of *A Little More Time...* is its optimism. "There was a lot of therapy going on [in recent years]," says Cartwright, who's planning at least one more Reigning Sound album and maybe another record with Coco Hames as the Parting Gifts. "I had a lot of unprocessed trauma and I needed to do some work. I think this album is more of a helpful statement than some things I've had to say in the past. And I can write better songs now."

Ian Harrison

A Little More Time With Reigning Sound is released this month on Merge Records.

Courtesy of Crypt Records

> **"I had a lot of unprocessed trauma... I needed to do some work."**
> **GREG CARTWRIGHT**

REIGN MASTERS

Cartwright gets it right.

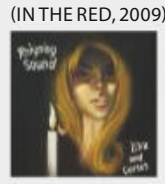
Reigning Sound
Break Up... Break Down
(SYMPATHY FOR THE RECORD INDUSTRY, 2001)

After The Oblivians' tumult, here comes soothing organ, country rock guitars, regret, and the heart's sad wisdom. Cartwright calls it, "the beginning of me as a much better songwriter... a lot of the early Reigning Sound stuff, it's kind of like crying in public." A cover of The Beach Boys' Waiting For The Day has a rictus grin, but the melancholy is real.

Reigning Sound
Home For Orphans
(SYMPATHY FOR THE RECORD INDUSTRY, 2005)

The rockers are outnumbered by the ballads on this leftovers comp, making it a noble jukebox of the heart for the lost and the lonely. Standouts include hopeless tearjerker What Could I Do?, where Cartwright modulates the title with degrees of tremor, hurt and transcendent defeat. "It's a total mish-mash but I think it's some of the strongest material I ever penned," says the singer.

Reigning Sound
Love And Curses
(IN THE RED, 2009)



Cartwright sounds desperate on this rocking soul for the down but not quite out. The sleeve – and line-up, for that matter – suggested flea markets and missed chances, but the songs, some punchy, some wistful, some arch, make it through. "The cover and dark tone put people off," says Greg. "I was kind of in a dark place then. But I think it really stands up."

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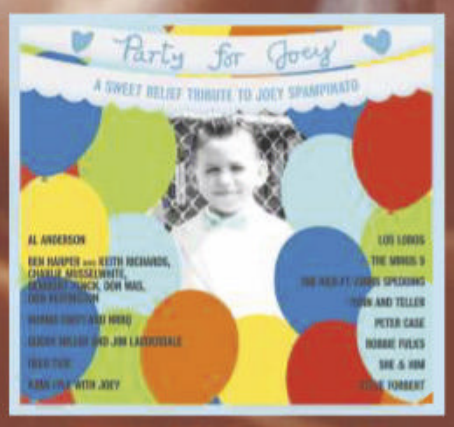
BEN HARPER
with Keith Richards, Charlie Musselwhite, Benmont Tench, Don Was, Don Heffington
BONNIE RAITT & NRBQ
BUDDY MILLER & JIM LAUDERDALE
DEER TICK
KAMI LYLE & JOEY
LOS LOBOS
THE MINUS 5
THE NILS w/ CHRIS SPEDDING
PENN & TELLER
PETER CASE
ROBBIE FULKS
SHE & HIM
STEVE FORBERT



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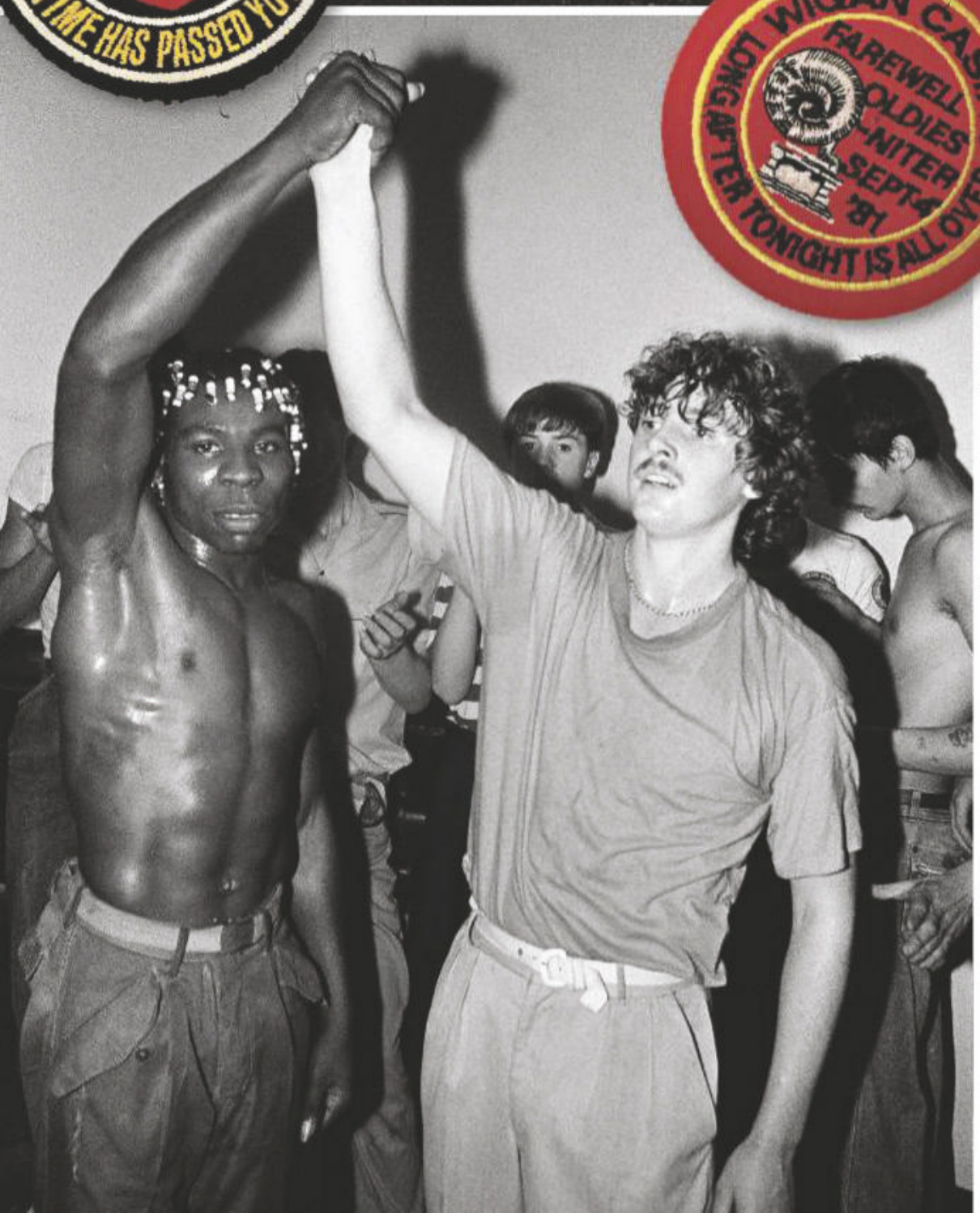
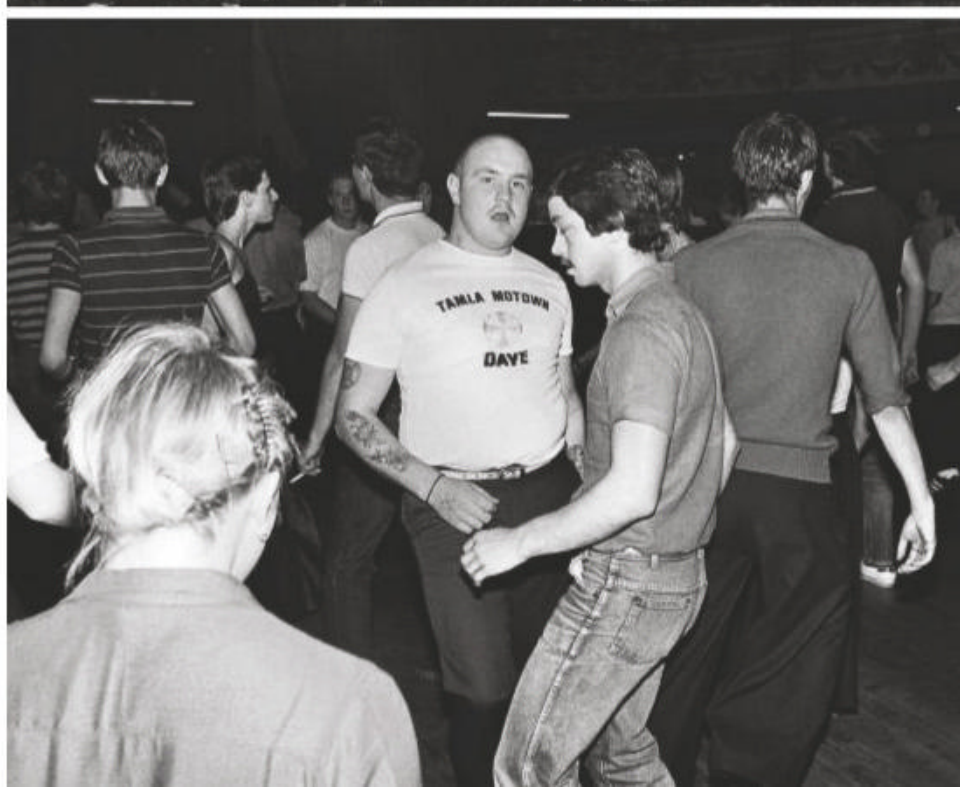
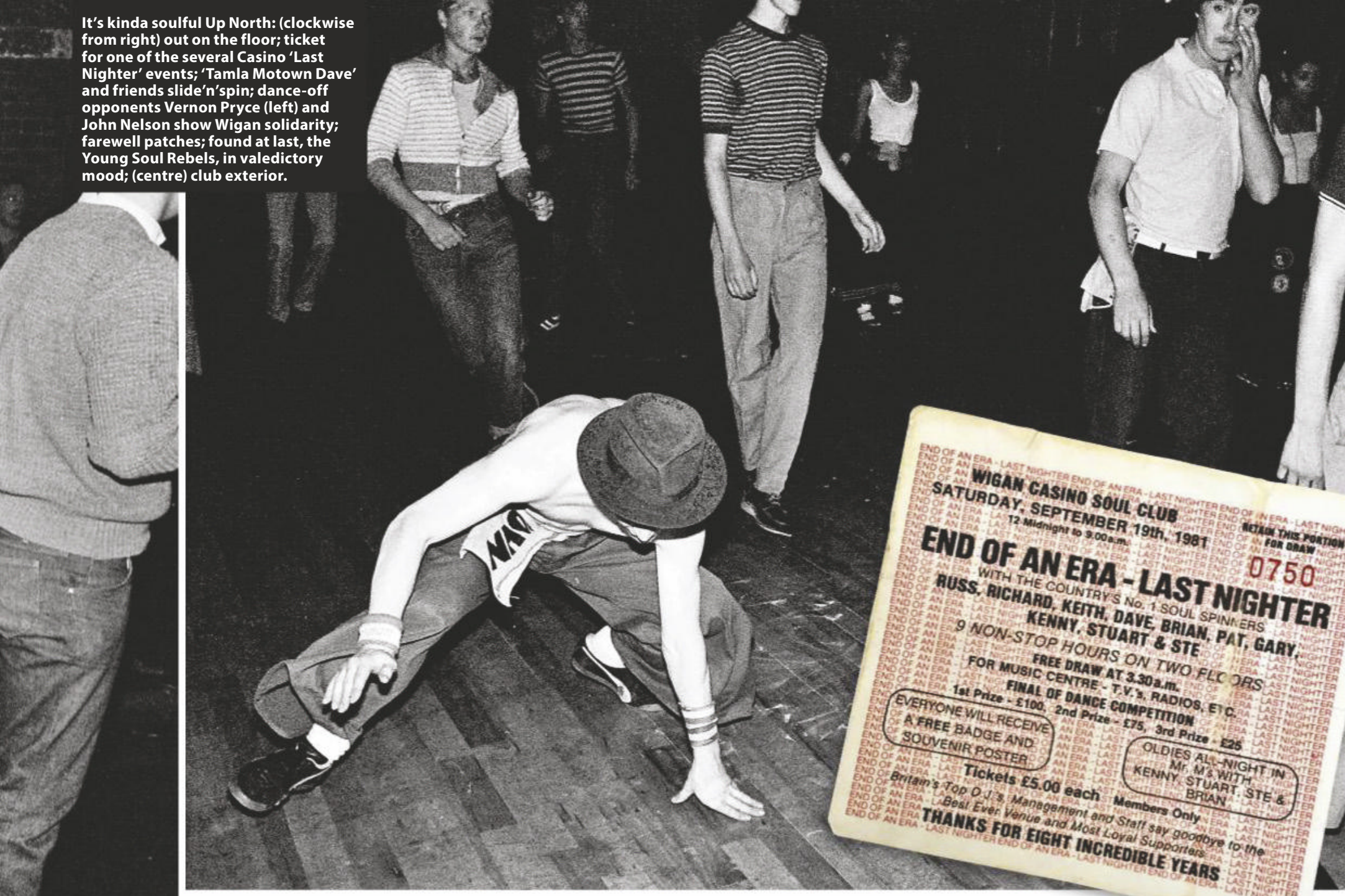
WHAT GOES ON!

WIGAN CASINO
End of An Era
SEPT 23rd '73
SEPT 19th '81
TIME HAS PASSED YOU BY


WIGAN CASINO LONG AFTER TONIGHT IS ALL OVER
FAREWELL OLDIES NITER SEPT 4 '81

Casino


TAMLA MOTOWN
DAVE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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19th, 1981
12 Midnight to 9.00a.m.
RETAIN THIS PORTION FOR DRAW
0750
END OF AN ERA - LAST NIGHTER
WITH THE COUNTRY'S No. 1 SOUL SPINNERS
RUSS, RICHARD, KEITH, DAVE, BRIAN, PAT, GARY, KENNY, STUART & STE
9 NON-STOP HOURS ON TWO FLOORS
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FOR MUSIC CENTRE - T.V.'s, RADIOS, ETC.
FINAL OF DANCE COMPETITION
1st Prize - £100, 2nd Prize - £75, 3rd Prize - £25
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OLDIES ALL-NIGHT IN Mr. M's WITH KENNY, STUART, STE & BRIAN
Tickets £5.00 each Members Only
Britain's Top D.J.'s, Management and Staff say goodbye to the Best Ever Venue and Most Loyal Supporters
THANKS FOR EIGHT INCREDIBLE YEARS

It's kinda soulful Up North: (clockwise from right) out on the floor; ticket for one of the several Casino 'Last Nighter' events; 'Tamla Motown Dave' and friends slide'n'spin; dance-off opponents Vernon Pryce (left) and John Nelson show Wigan solidarity; farewell patches; found at last, the Young Soul Rebels, in valedictory mood; (centre) club exterior.

Long Night Of The Soul

Francesco Mellina brings images of the last bash at the **Wigan Casino**…

THE CLAIM THAT Billboard voted the Wigan Casino "the best disco in the world" in 1978 may have been debunked, but this long-demolished soul nexus in the English north-west retains a special place in the global musical psyche. From September 23, 1973, as well as weeknight sessions there was an all-nighter on Saturday, where black music fans from across the UK would gather until dawn to show off their moves on the venue's fully sprung maple dancefloor.

December 6, 1981 was the last Casino all-nighter, after a couple of false finishes (see patches, left). Liverpool-based photographer Francesco Mellina was commissioned to cover it and "rock's Forgotten Tribe" by the NME 's Paul Du Noyer. The paper used only a few of his images, and now, in time for the 40th anniversary of the closure of the 'Heart of Soul', he's preparing his crowdfunded photo book Last Night At The Casino for a fuller view.

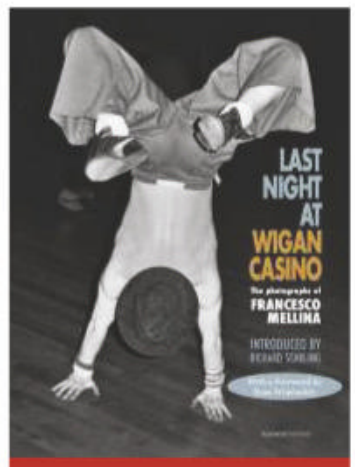
"I arrived two hours before it opened, and when I saw the crowds I realised, Right, I'm going to stay here all night and document it," says Mellina, an avowed admirer of the photography of Don McCullin, who'd been to the club a few times as a reveller. "I wanted to do something more in-depth, from the crowds outside to the doorman, to the coat lady, up the stairs to the balcony to the record bar, to the dancefloor."

He navigated the Casino's different areas armed with three rolls of 36 exposure film. "The sensory memory of it was phenomenal," he says. "You noticed this intense smell of talcum powder, which is so they could slide better on the dancefloor, these guys doing these unbelievable, balletic dance moves. One guy was doing handstands. It was hot, but that didn't matter, and strangely, it didn't seem that loud."

One of the scenes he, along with kids with Kodak Instamatics, captured was the Casino dance contest, where Vernon Pryce of Bradford triumphed over John Nelson of Glasgow, winning £100. "I love that picture of them holding their hands together in a spirit of unity," says Mellina.

"That was the beauty of it for me, that it was a genuinely working-class movement. They lived for the weekend and danced their bloody ass off all night long. It was an escape from the humdrum life of northern England, or for that matter all of England!"

With Casino DJs Russ Winstanley and Richard Searling providing forewords, the book will fascinate Northern soul fans who never got to spin at the Casino *and* original faith-keepers who still haven't got over the Wigan's Chosen Few record being a hit. To both constituencies, Mellina's shot of an exhausted dancer sleeping it off as the night wound down is a poignant endpoint.



"There was the smell of talcum powder… it was hot… it didn't seem that loud."

FRANCESCO MELLINA

"I could see the emotion that night," says Mellina, who recalls 1,500 clubbers emerging into the daylight. "People were really upset, sat on benches, some genuinely crying, because they knew it was over. Unfortunately, by then I'd finished my bloody film! I understood, that's how I felt when [Liverpool punk venue] Eric's closed… I couldn't claim to be one of the Northern soul [cognoscenti] but I at least got to experience it. I made the right decision. I stayed all night."

Ian Harrison

For Last Night Of The Casino ordering details, go to www.march-design.co.uk

Francesco Mellina (5), Thanks to Michael March for ticket and patches.

> "Water by no means cures everything."
> **CASSANDRA JENKINS**

In the driving seat: Cassandra Jenkins, ready to connect with people.

Wyndham Boylan-Garnett

FROM PURPLE MOUNTAINS TO A JUMP IN THE OCEAN… THE HEALING SOUNDS OF CASSANDRA JENKINS

FOUR DAYS after David Berman's death in August 2019, Cassandra Jenkins flew to Norway to stay with friends who lived on an island. She had recently been recruited to play acoustic guitar with Berman's new band Purple Mountains on a tour that, cruelly, would never happen. "I remember being on a fjord and thinking, I was supposed to be in Pittsburgh today," she says, from her family's New York home. "It was hard not to have this parallel schedule winding through my head."

Jenkins did not know the Silver Jews frontman long but his loss resonates through her beautiful second album, *An Overview On Phenomenal Nature*. "Farewell, Purple Mountains," she sings on Ambiguous Norway, "you're gone, you're everywhere." New Bikini, meanwhile, records her Norwegian hosts' advice for the grieving: "Baby, jump in the ocean… the water it cures everything." As she discovered after a trip to Mexico, however, it doesn't: "Ironically, I have been very sick for the past year and a half from drinking contaminated water," she says, "so water by no means cures everything. Maybe that's TMI."

It's this balance of gentle wonder and raw clarity that makes Jenkins' songs so affecting, outlining her quest for wholeness in a fragmented world. Songs such as the luminous spoken-word Hard Drive, where a psychic at a party promises to put her heart back together, are a reaction against her debut, 2017's *Play Till You Win*, a record that came "with strings and horns and pedal steel and all the layers". Here, she wants to be able to "walk on stage with a band that's never heard it before… follow me, it's two chords."

Jenkins grew up surrounded by visiting musicians and potluck suppers. From the age of 12, she played in a band with her siblings and parents, their Upper West Side home doubling up as a folk venue. Encouraged by her parents not to make music her job, she studied art, combining writing and performance with teaching, wedding photography and a stint at The New Yorker. After 2019, she was on the brink of giving up, only writing these songs so she had new material for one last tour, with The Hold Steady's Craig Finn. Yet *An Overview On Phenomenal Nature* has landed with such soft power, that Jenkins' future now looks different.

"I'm not sure I've ever connected with people in such a way that I've connected with people with this record, but it's all been virtual," she says. "To be able to do that in person would be such a great privilege. I have no idea what that's going to feel like. I'm in completely new waters."

Victoria Segal

An Overview On Phenomenal Nature is out now on Ba Da Bing.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Bill Callahan, Julia Holter, Laurie Anderson
- *An Overview On Phenomenal Nature* was recorded with Josh Kaufman of Bonny Light Horseman and Muzz, who has also worked with The Hold Steady's Craig Finn and Taylor Swift.
- Jenkins has previously played with Craig Finn, Eleanor Friedberger and Lola Kirke.
- Their "family band" might have played Western swing, but The Beatles Songbook was a fixture in the Jenkins house: "Learning Paul McCartney bass lines was such a great lesson. Respect was the first song I learned to play on the bass, then Hello Goodbye, then Good Times, Bad Times, the Led Zeppelin song."

KEY TRACKS

- Hard Drive
- Michelangelo
- New Bikini

HEAVEN KNOWS, IT'S RODRIGO AMARANTE: TROPICÁLIA'S ANSWER TO JOHNNY MARR!

"I'M JUST circling the same idea and probably will continue to do that for ever. I hope I'm inching closer to what I'm trying to say." Sitting in his home studio just north of Los Angeles's Downtown, Rodrigo Amarante is coming to terms with being a MOJO Rising star after two decades in the business. "At least I'm still ascending. Not yet descending or having my records be 'rediscovered' because nobody gave a shit for 20 years," he laughs.

If descending is not on the agenda, downsizing regularly seems to be a factor in the Brazilian's methodology. He joined rockers Los Hermanos while a student; their reunions continue to sell out stadiums in South America. As a side project, his samba big band, Orquestra Imperial, filled concert halls across the world; the Little Joy project he formed with The Strokes' Fab Moretti and Binki Shapiro was a critical hit. For more than 10 years, however, he has been working either solo or as a co-conspirator with the likes of Gilberto Gil and Norah Jones.

"I did think moving from a rock band to a 1950s samba band was a big break, or coming to North America, where no one knows me. Looking back, it's like a bad film script. I see a thread. In Los Hermanos I was writing more arrangements, and the Orquestra was a school, working with amazing musicians. I took a lot of what I'd learnt to Little Joy: don't play every instrument all the time. With both my solo albums, *Cavalo* and [the forthcoming] *Drama*, there are echoes of Orquestra Imperial, definitely, but also Los Hermanos."

> "Looking back, it's like a bad film script."
> **RODRIGO AMARANTE**

And, it has to be said, of the more poetic British indie bands. He doesn't baulk at the idea. "I love Johnny Marr, I wanted to be Johnny, but I wanted to be Morrissey, too." But what attracted a boy from Ipanema to the humdrum towns of northern England?

"When I was younger, my family moved to the city of Fortaleza, in the north of Brazil, right on the Equator, and I was ostracised, suffocated by the eternal summer. So, yeah, there are different colours and different pressures, but The Smiths really understood the oppressive natural environment I was in. And I think that's the goal: for me to write and dump my shit on other people's laps and leave enough space that my songs become tools for others."

David Hutcheon

Drama will be released by Polyvinyl on July 16.

FACT SHEET

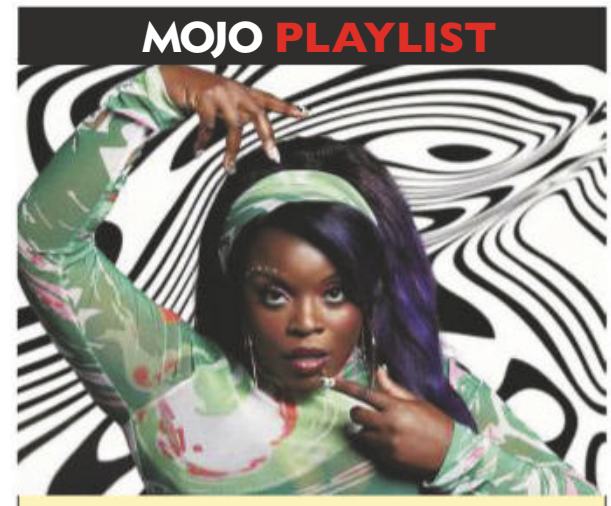
- For fans of: Tom Zé, Devendra Banhart, Beck, Seu Jorge, Os Mutantes, The Smiths.
- *Drama* follows a love affair from start to end, Amarante giving the 11 songs an arc that includes "setting the mood" (ominous), "attachment equals suffering" and "relief/mourning".
- Amarante's parents ran a samba school by the beach, with his gran and her sisters making the costumes for carnival. He started playing percussion in the parades aged six.
- Amarante's best-known song outside Brazil is Tuyo, the theme tune to the Netflix drama Narcos.

KEY TRACKS

- Tuyo
- Maná
- The Next Time Around

"I was suffocated by the eternal summer": Rodrigo Amarante, The Smiths understood.

MOJO PLAYLIST



Be upstanding – it's the month's best country soul, jazz and dub.

1 YOLA DIAMOND STUDDED SHOES
Fresh from playing Sister Rosetta Tharpe in the forthcoming Elvis biopic, Bristol's soul evangelist reunites with Dan Auerbach's Nashville cats. Light-footed!
Find it: *YouTube*

2 REBEL CONTROL DON'T LET THEM FOOL YA
That Marley reference won't be lost on conscious reggae fans, here supplied by Rodigan-endorsed UK collective.
Find it: *streaming services*

3 BIRDS OF MAYA BFIOU
Bug-eyed, boulder-smashing ramalam in the Stooges grand tradition, courtesy of Mike Polizze and his reanimated Philly psych thugs.
Find it: *YouTube*

4 ANITA LANE THE WORLD'S A GIRL
As MOJO went to press, we learned of the passing of Birthday Party/Bad Seeds collaborator Anita Lane. A fuller appreciation will appear next issue. Until then, this 1995 Warren Ellis-assisted trip into memory.
Find it: *YouTube*

5 JAIMIE BRANCH THEME 001
Immense Miles Davis-esque tonalities from the New York-based trumpet star, live in Zurich, with hyperactive percussionists and an understandably hyped-up crowd.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

6 MARINERO NUESTRA VICTORIA
Lament for a Mexican bakery in SF's Mission district. A perky Latin arrangement slows down to late-afternoon melancholy.
Find it: *streaming services*

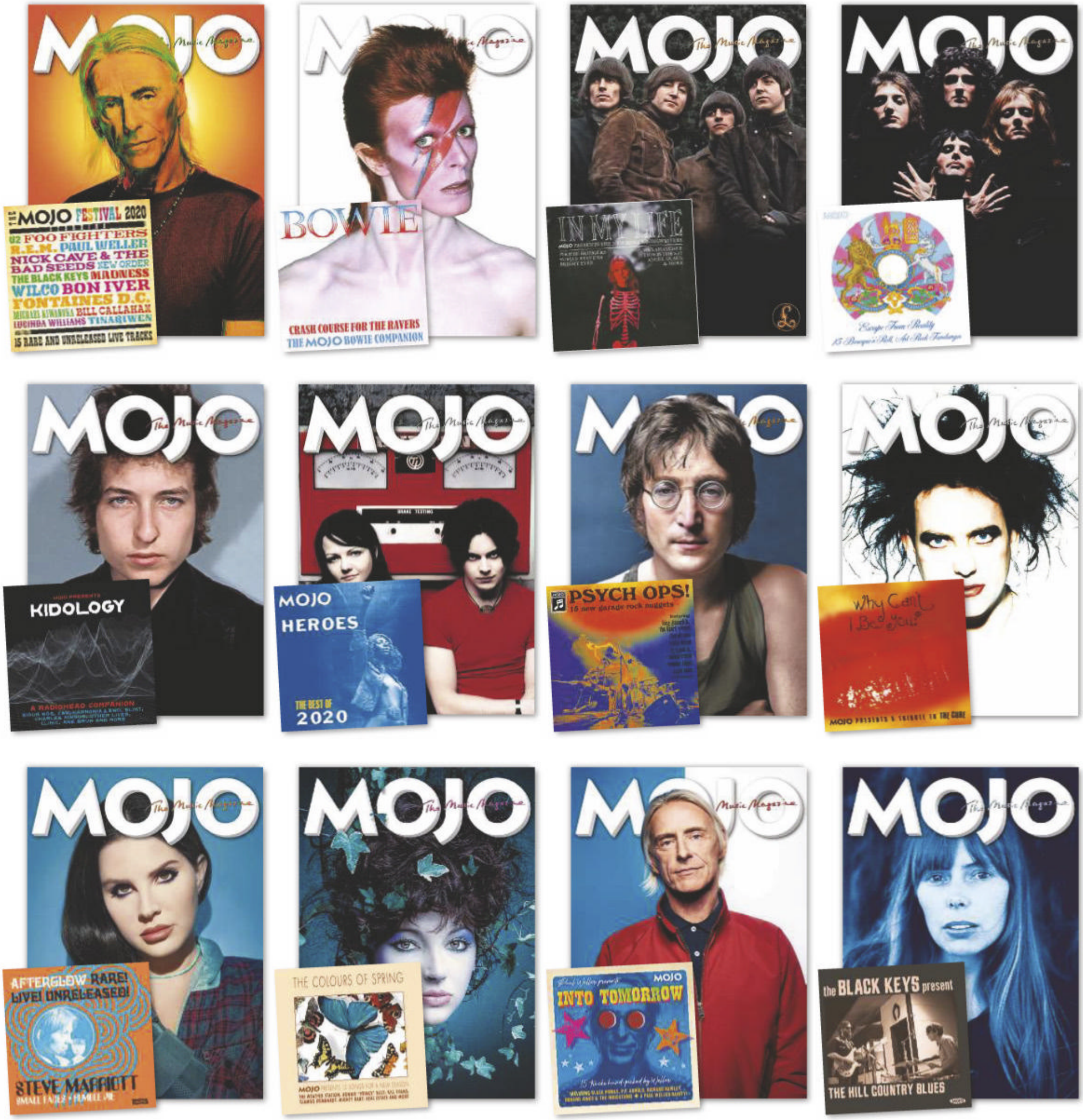
7 JARV IS... SWANKY MODES (DENNIS BOVELL MIX)
A requiem for lost time, via boutiques and casual sex. Bovell's dubbing adds to the lonely grot.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

8 PETER BRODERICK ALL-BOY ALL-GIRL
From a series of split 7-inches covering Arthur Russell, PB puts a delicate flesh on the bones.
Find it: *streaming services*

9 GIZELLE SMITH KING OF THE MOUNTAIN
Deep funk exploration of Kate Bush's *Aerial* centrepiece by UK soul singer Smith, for her father, Four Tops guitarist Joe Louis Smith.
Find it: *YouTube*

10 JIM REID MOTAROLA
From the cancer fundraising covers cassette *Train Driver In Eyeliner*, which marks late Gun Club/JAMC/Earl Brutus drummer Nick Sanderson's 60th birthday: Reid has fuzzy, endlessly-looping visions of flight and inertia, trapped in the car park of his mind.
Find it: *SoundCloud*

Joseph Ross Smith



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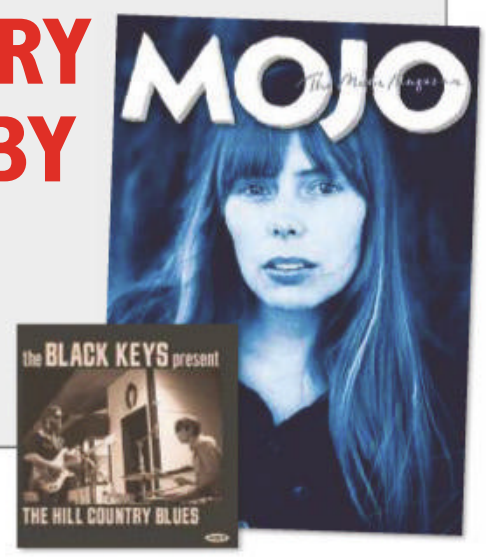

DIGITAL ONLY

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He **won the ’90s** with **Oasis**, survived **noughties meltdown** and **solo regeneration**. But why doesn’t he like **Wonderwall?** And what is that **itch he’s scratching?** “All my songs are about **yearning for something**,” says **Noel Gallagher**.

Interview by **DORIAN LYNSKEY** • Portrait by **MATT CROCKETT**

IT WOULD NOT TAKE A MASTER DETECTIVE TO work out who owns this bijou new studio in King’s Cross. The walls bustle with vintage Beatles posters, a motorway sign for Manchester City’s former Maine Road stadium and a photographic gallery of music icons: Neil Young, the Sex Pistols, Public Enemy. This is Gallagher country.

Since the studio was finished between lockdowns last autumn, it has become a haven for Noel Gallagher. “We decided we’d prolong the kids’ childhoods a bit and move out to the country and of course fucking lockdown happened and we were pretty much stranded so it’s been a test for all of us,” he says with exasperation. “If I hadn’t had this place I’d be suffering now. What’s really annoyed me is watching celebrities say, ‘Well, I’ve been having a great time.’ Keep that to your fucking self.”

Gallagher’s been busy. Revitalised by working with producer David Holmes on 2017’s freewheeling *Who Built The Moon?*, he released three disco-curious EPs in 10 months before lockdown and is now halfway through album number four, which is “turning out to be a cross-section of everything I’ve ever done.”

EP highlights and two new songs round out *Back The Way We Came Vol. 1 2011-2021: The Best Of Noel Gallagher’s High Flying Birds*. That “Vol. 1” may seem like a flex, but Gallagher puts it down to pragmatism. “The title was so fucking good I thought I’m fucked if I’m coming up with another one. I couldn’t believe it had never been used before.”

Avalon

All Best Ofs tell a story. Oasis’s 2006 compilation *Stop The Clocks* traced the dramatic arc of the Mancunian’s first act, from the point he joined his younger brother’s band aged 24 and steered them to success on an era-defining scale, combining sing-along ’60s pop and ’70s rock heaviness with an edge that had deep roots in never-resolved differences between Liam and Noel, singer and songwriter. That arc ended in 2009 after one final mid-tour bust-up in Paris, exhaustively replayed and picked-over by interviewers ever since.

Back The Way We Came tells a very different tale. Following the Oasis methadone of Gallagher’s eponymous debut, he pushed the boat out on *Chasing Yesterday* and sailed into uncharted waters on *Who Built The Moon?*. Once the captain of a battleship, he now pilots a nippy little speedboat. Study the lyrics and you’ll notice an abiding theme of running away from something, or chasing the unattainable, that sits oddly with his family-man life. (He has two sons, 13 and 10, with Sara MacDonald and a daughter, 21, with first wife Meg Mathews.) “It’s a pretty stable life but it would be boring to write about that,” he says. “All my songs are about yearning for something. When I was young I *was* yearning for something: a better life, nicer surroundings, fame, wealth, whatever.”

He still has one toe in the past, launching a film production company with Liam, Kosmic Kyte, for an Oasis documentary ➢

WE’RE NOT WORTHY

Mentor/pal **Johnny Marr** outs a closet romantic.

“His background is the same as mine – the Irish-Mancunian thing. That plays really big into Noel’s nature, talent and work ethic. We all know he’s one of the funniest people on Earth, no-nonsense, unpretentious, but his music is life-affirming. He’s a romantic! But pragmatic, too: such a fucking Gemini.”

project due later this year. The further away he gets from his time in the stratosphere, the clearer his vision. "At the time we were just living it," he says. "It's only as the years have gone by that you look back on it and try to make sense of what it all was."

How important was music in your house growing up?

My dad used to DJ in the Irish social clubs so he had a big vinyl collection. He would make up tapes and sell them on Longsight market. Country & western and Irish traditional music were huge but I wouldn't say my mum and dad were pop music fans. I remember my dad going out once and not coming back for a couple of days and when he came back he had a guitar: a blonde Gibson Hummingbird. Maybe he won it at cards. I picked it up one day and started playing Joy Division (*hums Love Will Tear Us Apart*) and it just went from there.

He was infamously violent towards you. Did music provide any kind of father-son connection?

Not in the slightest. They were rough times. Your family weren't the kind of people who encouraged you to follow your dreams. Get out to work, earn your keep, that was it. I had no dreams of becoming anything until I was in my late teens.

How did your Beatles obsession start? They were generally considered naff mum-and-dad music when you were a teenager…

I remember listening to City on the radio and the match commentary was interrupted to say that John Lennon was dead. You know the name but you're not really aware of what he's done. But there was this outpouring. I was interested in who this guy was and going backwards. I was always an inquisitive child.

You had a three-year rave phase at the Haçienda in the late 1980s. Did you ever try to make dance music?

When those ecstasy pills came out called doves I did a track with [future Oasis producer] Mark Coyle called You Are My Dove. It sounded a bit like Sneaker Pimps. Those three years in the Haçienda, that was life. The outside world did not exist, the future didn't exist. It was just the nightclub and the music and the drugs.

You and Mark were both roadies for Inspiral Carpets at the time…

I'd grown up thinking, Wouldn't it be great to be in music? When they asked me to audition for the singer's job I thought, This is it. And then when they offered me a job as a roadie I thought, No, *this* is it. This is better. I still say to my crew they're jammy bastards. They get paid a lot of money, travel the world and nobody knows who they are. I fucking loved it.

What's the first song you wrote that you thought was any good?

Before I left home I met this guy Pete through an ad in the Manchester Evening News. He had a little 4-track and we wrote these songs together. I remember playing the demo tape to people and the overriding reaction was a look of surprise: "Fucking hell, is this what you do?"

And the first song you thought was genuinely great?

Live Forever. I wrote it on John Squire's Gretsch Country Gent because one of their roadies lived at Mark Coyle's house and it ended up at my house. When I played it at the next rehearsal Bonehead said, "You've not just written that fucking song. That's from somewhere else." I'd listened to enough music to know that was a classic. It was Mark Coyle that came up with the drumbeat because when he was checking the drums on the last [Inspiral Carpets] tour I would play those chords. It's funny how a song changes everything.

You moved into India House in central Manchester when you were 19 and wrote most of *Definitely Maybe* there. Can you describe that room?

At one end was a window looking out onto Whitworth Street, at the other end was a little kitchen area, a couch, a fish tank and a TV. I was living with this girl who worked at Benetton. She'd go to work and I'd be at home getting stoned and writing songs all day. I still do it now. Lockdown has actually reminded me of being on the dole a bit.

There was no precedent for a band from indie origins becoming remotely as big as Oasis became. What was the scope of your ambition back then?

It was one phase at a time. We only actively pursued a record deal when we gave our initial cassette to the head of A&R at Factory, Phil Sachs. He told us [Factory boss] Tony [Wilson] thought it was too baggy. He was right. I often think if we'd have been signed by Factory we'd have been a step up from Northside. I think we were very, very lucky not to get signed for a couple of years. [Alan] McGee was the first person to go, "You were great."

You didn't dream of stadiums then?

Fucking hell, no. Indie music wasn't in arenas then. The biggest you could get was Brixton Academy. When *Definitely Maybe* took off, our promoters said: "There's this new arena opening in Sheffield. We're thinking of putting you on there next month." I was like, "Do you think we'll fill it?" And they said, "We could probably do 10 nights." We didn't realise what was going on. I kind of shut it all out. The thing that kept me grounded was the songwriting. I thought as long as I don't take that for granted, I can handle everything else. The 'that'll do' era would come later.

Have you seen the movie Creation Stories?

I was going to watch it from behind the couch

A LIFE IN PICTURES

Gallagher's gallery: high-flier Noel.

1 The Gallagher clan in the mid-'70s: (from left) Noel, Paul, Liam, mother Peggy. "I was an inquisitive child."

2 "*This* is it. This is better": Noel, the Inspiral Carpets' roadie and loving it.

3 Starting to live forever: "It's funny how a song changes everything." Oasis at the Splash Club, King's Cross, London, January 27, 1994.

4 "Every Oasis story should really end at Knebworth": the band check the site, and the weather, 1996 (from left) Alan White, Paul 'Bonehead' Arthurs, Liam, Paul 'Guigsy' McGuigan, Noel.

5 "I'll do a fucking tune with you!": Noel with Tom Rowlands of the Chemical Brothers at the Q Awards, Park Lane Hotel, London, 2000.

6 Come Together: (from left) Pauls Weller and McCartney with Noel at Abbey Road studios to record The Beatles' song for *The Help Album* in aid of War Child for, Bosnian relief, 1995.

7 Downing one in Downing Street: meeting the new Prime Minister Tony Blair at a Number 10 reception, 1997.

8 Transatlantic flight: Noel takes his High Flying Birds to the US for NBC's The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, February 8, 2018.

9 "It's more pure now": on-stage with his high fliers, SSE Arena, Wembley, London, April 27, 2018.

Capital, WENN, Alamy (2), Alpha, Getty (2), Shutterstock, Ian Dickson

but it's actually all right. We forget how fucking amazing that record company was – not just for the records it put out but for the characters who passed through the doors. Kevin Shields, Bobby Gillespie, our kid, to name but three. It was great reliving those years. But I did say to McGee nobody wants to hear about rehab. Every story that contains the Oasis story should really end at Knebworth.

Did you always know if a song would be sung by you or by Liam? Could any of them have gone the other way?

No. The only time I laid down the law was Wonderwall and Don't Look Back In Anger. I was so fucked off with him walking off stage and me having to take over and do the gig. I remember thinking, If I'm going to keep doing this, I want a big fucking song to sing. I said, "You're singing one or the other but not both." He hated Wonderwall. He said it was trip-hop. There speaks a man who's never heard trip-hop. He wanted to sing Don't Look Back In Anger but it became apparent during the recording that Wonderwall was going to be *the* tune. If I'm being honest, I shouldn't have sung either of them because I wasn't really a singer then.

So you don't like the recording of Don't Look Back In Anger?

I don't like any of the recordings on [*(What's The Story)*] *Morning Glory*. It's the only album we never did demos for. I was writing on tour and I'd planned on finishing the songs when I got to the studio and we just never got around to it. Cast No Shadow is half-written. Wonderwall. Morning Glory.

Last year, Wonderwall became the first song from the 1990s to exceed one billion streams. Any theory as to why it's become The One?

I have no idea. It beggars belief. Wonderwall is one of my least favourite songs because it's not finished. If I could somehow twist time and go back there, I'd pick a different song for our calling card. Probably Some Might Say.

Your lyrics pursue a feeling rather than a precise meaning. Do they change for you over the years?

Yeah, totally. I'm just trying to serve the melody. I don't hold on to the meaning of any song. I remember being asked back in the '90s, usually by Americans, about that line in Champagne Supernova: "Slowly walking down the hall/Faster than a cannonball." What does it mean? The tour before last, I was on-stage in Scotland and everybody's got their top off – these kids who could only have been 10 when Oasis split up. And I thought, *That's* what it means. It's a 20-year-old kid crying his eyes out.

> **"Your family** weren't people who encouraged you to **follow your dreams.** Earn your keep, **that was it."**

I always assumed it was about acid.

It's definitely a drug reference. You know when you do loads of coke and your brain's racing but your limbs weigh a ton? I was out of my fucking mind writing Champagne Supernova in the Landmark Hotel in Marylebone. Typical '90s scene – everyone had left, champagne bottles, carnage on the coffee table – and the song fell out of the sky. Songs used to fall out of the sky every fucking day in the '90s.

Did you ever feel like you needed drugs to write songs?

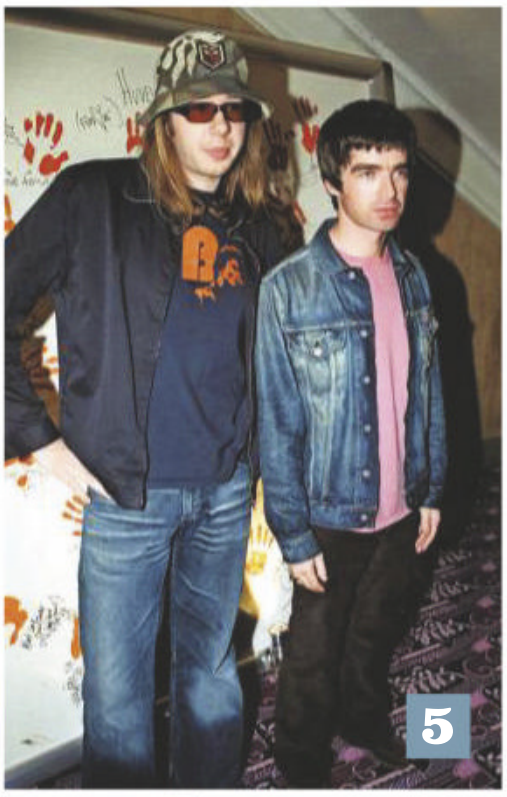
I don't think I ever did *need* to be on drugs, it's just that I always *was* on drugs. What it did for me was take away the second guessing. When I started to second guess everything, that's when it didn't have the vital thing.

Perhaps the ultimate proof of your imperial phase was when your deranged Chemical Brothers collaboration, Setting Sun, went to Number 1 in the UK. How did that come about?

I knew them from [notorious London club night] the Sunday Social. I remember being at the bar with them and I said, "I'll do a fucking tune with you." City had played Wycombe on a Friday night away, we'd lost one-nil, and I went from Wycombe to the studio. I did it in about 20 minutes. I even left the taxi waiting outside. And then the next thing I knew it had knocked [Deep Blue Something's] Breakfast At Tiffany's off Number 1. That felt like a proper triumph. The '90s! What a decade! You had an idea, you did it, you moved on to something else.

Oasis were associated with hunger and hedonism but you wrote a lot of melancholy songs about lost youth even then: Fade Away, Half The World Away, Live Forever. Where did that come from?

Well, I didn't have a great childhood. And I always had an old head on my shoulders. Even when I was 19 my mum used to say, "You're like a fecking old man." I've never been a puppy. I've never had that wild abandon. One of the great things about Oasis is Liam was the puppy. Everything I didn't have, he could deliver and everything he didn't have, I could deliver.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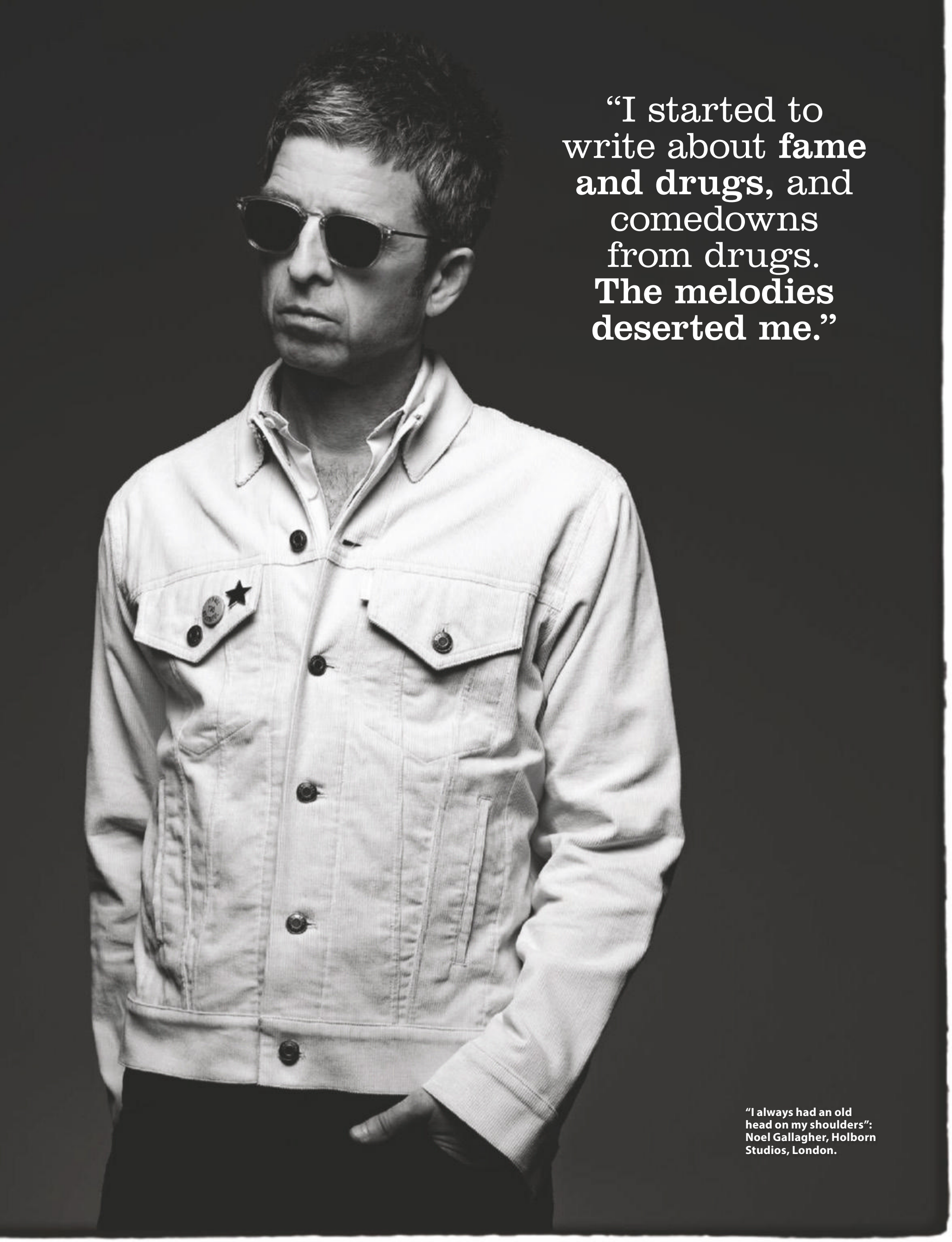

"I always had an old head on my shoulders": Noel Gallagher, Holborn Studios, London.

Moving on to 1997, some of the *Be Here Now* B-sides – Going Nowhere, The Fame – felt like cries for help…

Yeah. There's a B-side [from 2000] called Let's All Make Believe: "Let's all make believe that we're still friends and we like each other." Some of my least favourite work is from *Be Here Now* to *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants* when I thought it's time to get serious. I started to write about fame and drugs, comedowns from drugs, and other people being fucked up by drugs. The melodies deserted me. When I hear *Be Here Now* I always think of the missed opportunity. Not many people get to be the sole songwriter of the biggest band in the world and this is your statement to the world. And I just said, "Fuck it, that'll do." But it didn't ruin the band. It just sent it into a lower orbit. It's all character-building.

Which songs would you keep from those lean years?

D'You Know What I Mean. I fucking love it. My Big Mouth. Stand By Me. Go Let It Out is brilliant nonsense. Stop Crying Your Heart Out. Little By Little. Look, some songwriters would die to have two of those songs in their entire lives. The live thing sustained us. We were still playing stadiums while not being very good.

So the bad reviews were fair enough?

Yeah. You're looking around and other bands are making career-defining albums: *Urban Hymns*, *OK Computer*, *Parachutes*. They're a step ahead of you. You know that whatever you're doing is not as good.

Don't Go Away on *Be Here Now* is a good song smothered by production. Did some songs get away from you in the studio?

When a band becomes a phenomenon like Oasis you get to a point where the only thing the guy you meet at a party's got to say about them is, "I don't like them." Because it was so omni-present. Once *Be Here Now* was a bit under-whelming, the backlash started. Alan McGee did not do us any favours by announcing that it would sell 20 million copies and Sony didn't do us any favours by not letting people talk about it. There was a perfect storm of lots of little niggly bad press things. All that being said, if those tunes had been undeniable it would have been great. But they weren't.

How did it feel to have a songwriting gift and then lose it for several years?

It's really frustrating. It would be like (*long pause*) going to have sex with a beautiful woman and not being able to get it up. Weller had a period when he was lost and I asked him, "What's that all about?" And he said, "When it goes, do not chase it." What he meant is, Don't think everything you write is going to be good but you still have to write it because that's another shit one out of the way and eventually you'll get to something worthwhile. The next song after Live Forever that changed every-thing for me was The Importance Of Being Idle [from 2005's *Don't Believe The Truth*]. I remember thinking, "It's back." We'd been a straight-up rock band, then it started to get a bit quirky, and that's stood me in good stead since.

It's obvious now that you have a broad and interesting taste in music, but in Oasis you came across as a classic-rock reactionary. Were you holding back?

It's difficult to make this statement without sounding like I'm slagging Liam off, but… he was way more conservative in his tastes than I am. He literally listens to The Beatles and John Lennon and that's it. When we were doing *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants*, Spike [Stent], who was producing, got the drum machines out and I said, "Our kid will be up in 40 minutes. Have them out of the room before he gets here because it will frighten him. All these flashing lights will freak him out." Oasis were such a brand, it was difficult to step outside that. Bonehead and Guigs never really said why they left but I think they thought, This music is changing and it's not the way that it was.

So it was changing too much for them but…

Not enough for me. Yeah. When you play a song to your bandmates you need them all to stand up and say, "That's amazing." If one of them is going "pthrrrt", and that one happens to be the singer, forget it, it isn't happening. It's like you want the love of a parent. You do things to please people. After *Be Here Now* I wanted to throw it up in the air a little bit but I didn't really have the chops. If I'd had 10 songs like Go Let It Out, I'd have hammered them home. The material had to be undeniably great.

Matt Crockett

Was your solo debut originally intended to be a side-project before returning to Oasis?

No, that was going to be the next Oasis album. On that last tour I wrote If I Had A Gun, Everybody's On The Run and (I Wanna Live In A Dream In My) Record Machine. AKA… What A Life! was the last thing I wrote. That's my birth as a solo artist. It's a feeling I'd only read about: when you're doing something you know is great but you know other people will heavily question. I've had that feeling a few times, like Black Star Dancing. That's right where you want to be as an artist. You're daring people to dislike it.

What story does *Back The Way We Came Vol. 1* tell?

The story is, without being too flowery about it, like a flower unfolding. It starts with me still wearing the same clothes as Oasis and shedding that layer on the first album, then getting a tiny bit further out on *Chasing Yesterday* and then finally, with *Who Built The Moon?*, feeling that I'd left that behind and had no boundaries. With the EPs I'm free as a bird.

You used to be not just aware of your limitations but proud of them. What changed?

SUPERSONIC FLIGHTS

Three key Noel G LPs, teed up by **Danny Eccleston**.

THE ROUGH DIAMOND

Oasis

★★★★★

Definitely Maybe

(CREATION, 1994)

The advent of "a new, young British psychedelia" (© Noel Gallagher) – a combination of excitement and melody that critics initially couldn't see for the reference points. But it's also about timing: these were songs about being legendary that their writer knew couldn't, couldn't *ever* be more than fantasies ("In my mind my dreams are real"), and that's what made them universal.

THE AGE OF DECADENCE

Oasis

★★★

Be Here Now

(CREATION, 1997)

The overblown production is a given, and the triumphalism that rang false in the dusk of Britpop is no more charming now. But Noel rightly rates its standout tunes – D'You Know What I Mean, My Big Mouth, Stand By Me – and later Oasis albums would have begged for an I Hope, I Think, I Know (although maybe not a Magic Pie). If only A1 B-sides Stay Young and Going Nowhere had been on it.

ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds

★★★★

Chasing Yesterday

(SOUR MASH, 2015)

The pointed title – Gallagher gets the boot in first – belies an album of his first future-facing music since 2000's Go Let It Out. Tropicália-tinted Riverman has lovely chords. The Dying Of The Light is the chastened future self of the narrator of Live Forever; Ballad Of The Mighty I the first shoot of the disco interest that would flower on the recent Black Star Dancing. He'd stopped bellowing, too.

It was David [Holmes] that made me realise I haven't got any limitations. If he'd said to me, "Put the fucking guitar away, nobody wants to hear that," I'd have been like, "You cheeky cunt, fuck off." But it was like psychology. He said, "You're the best at that. But really? Do you want to keep doing that forever?" The night before we started we were at his house playing records and he'd say, "You've got great taste. You should make the music that you listen to." I was like, "Yes! How do I do that?" And how you do it is you go to someone who can drag it out of you.

Could that approach have worked earlier?

Not in the band, no. Producers for us were referees because the songs were already written. I remember Paul McCartney's golden rule was you must have the songs written before you go to the studio. David was like, "Forget that, that's no fun." The two biggest musical influences have been the Amorphous Androgynous and David Holmes. I wouldn't be where I am without them. They opened the door to tons of music I would never have bothered trying to find, like obscure French pop and Krautrock and world music. I found it really fucking inspiring. If you've been really successful at doing one thing, why would you have the notion of not doing that?

How much of songwriting, for you, is craft and how much is inspiration?

I'd say it's 50/50. I like to feel that I'm switched on and waiting for it to happen. I'm available for work every day. When you're younger you're available for work *24 hours a day*. It's no coincidence that the general pattern of a songwriter's life is that they do most of their best work up to their thirties and then it becomes more hit-and-miss. That's when you have to start changing it up.

And the longest you've taken to finish a song?

[2015 solo single] Lock All The Doors. Half of it I used for the Chemical Brothers track. I had that song knocking around from before we got signed. I thought I'll use that verse because it fits and I'll write another one. It took me 20 years.

Have you ever plagiarised a song by mistake?

It's not ever intentional but once it's in my brain I can't get it out. It's like the Gary Glitter bit at the end of Hello. I remember doing the demo and that bit was just a joke. Of course I couldn't get rid of it. And of course I didn't know Gary Glitter was a raving nonce at the time. I guess the inspiration for that comes from Weller when he did Start! and it's Taxman. He said in an interview, "Well, I wasn't expecting anyone not to notice." I thought that was really fucking cool. There's been a couple of times when I've been advised to sue other people and I've always taken the moral high ground.

How long can you go without writing?

The only time I'm not within arm's length of an instrument is when I'm on holiday with Sara and the kids. The first thing I do when I get back is play the guitar. I have this irrational fear – if I even think about retiring, it will go away and never come back. I have to keep chipping away just to check that it's still there. I've no hobbies. If I worked in an office, this would be my hobby.

How are your motives different now from when you started out?

I do it for the love of the craft and the pursuit of writing songs that people will love and take into their lives. Back when we started, because you're skint, you're like, Right, I want a massive telly, a big house, a bird with big tits, a fucking chimp and an aeroplane. It's more pure now.

Back The Way We Came Vol. 1 2011-2021: The Best Of Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds is out June 11 on Sour Mash.

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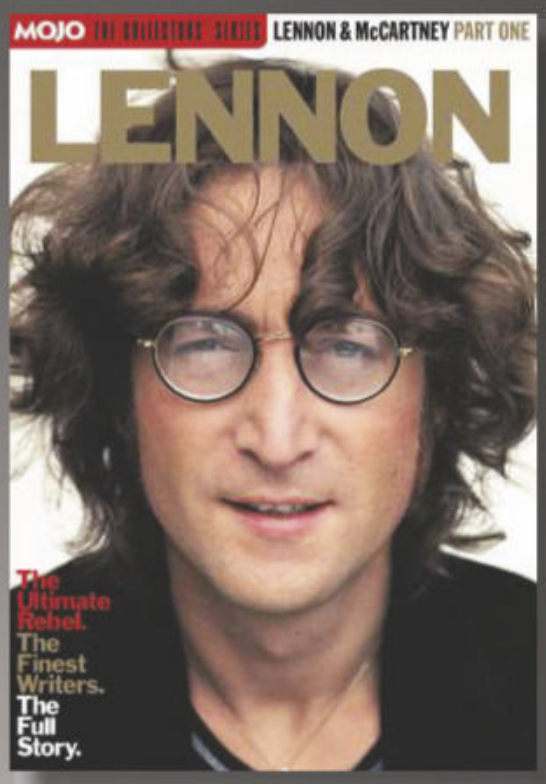

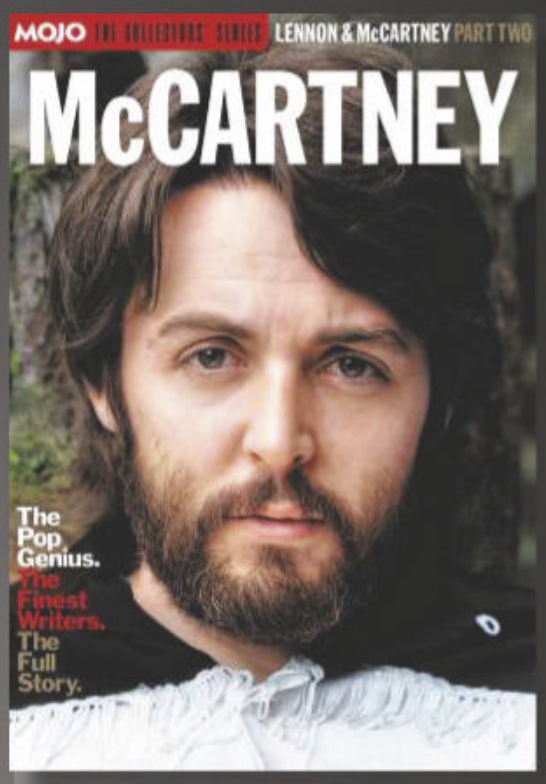

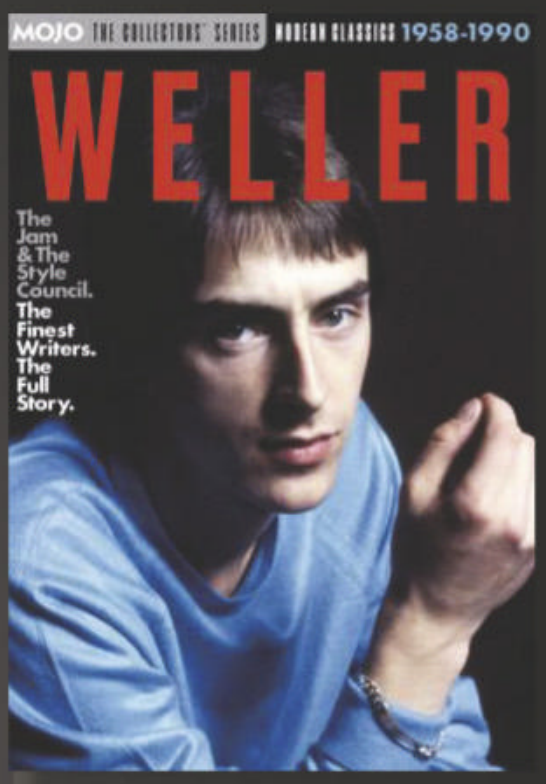

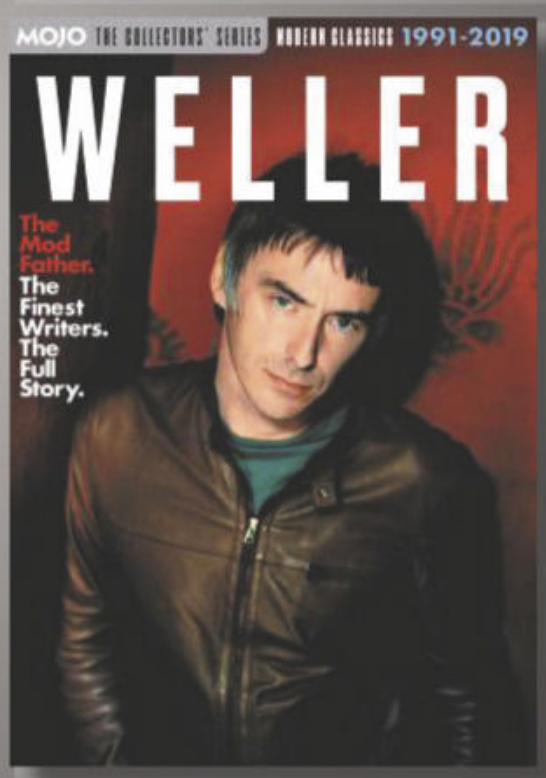

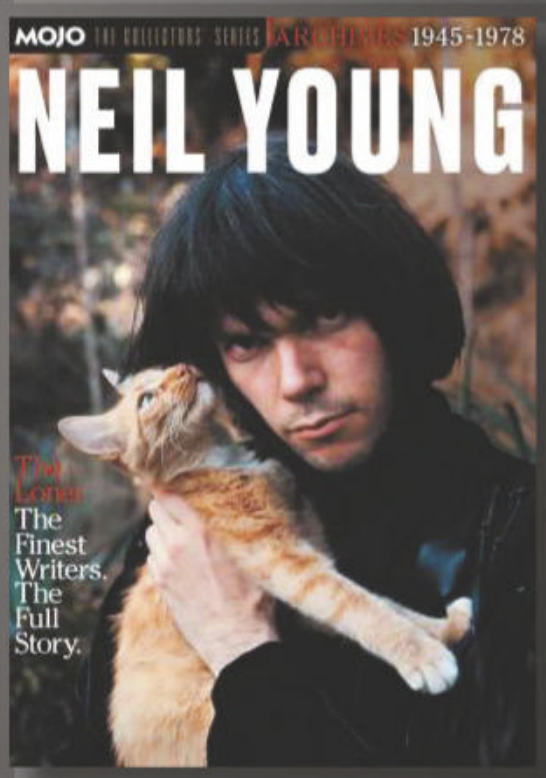

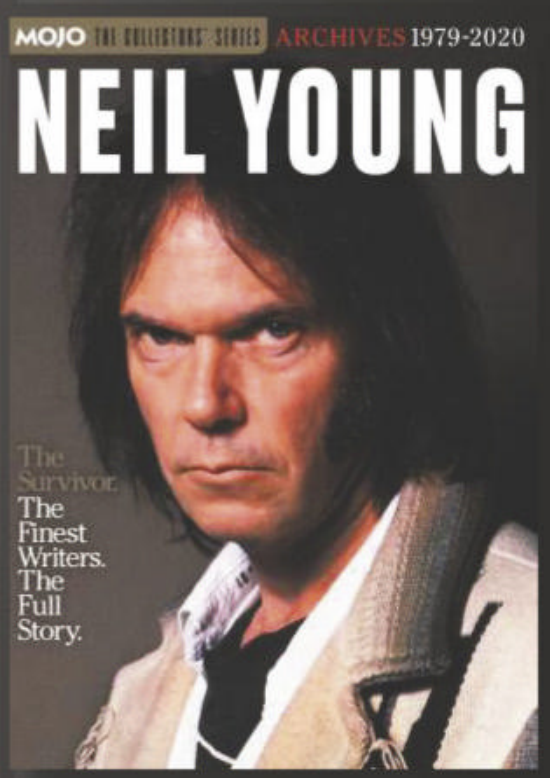

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PROLE ART THREAT!

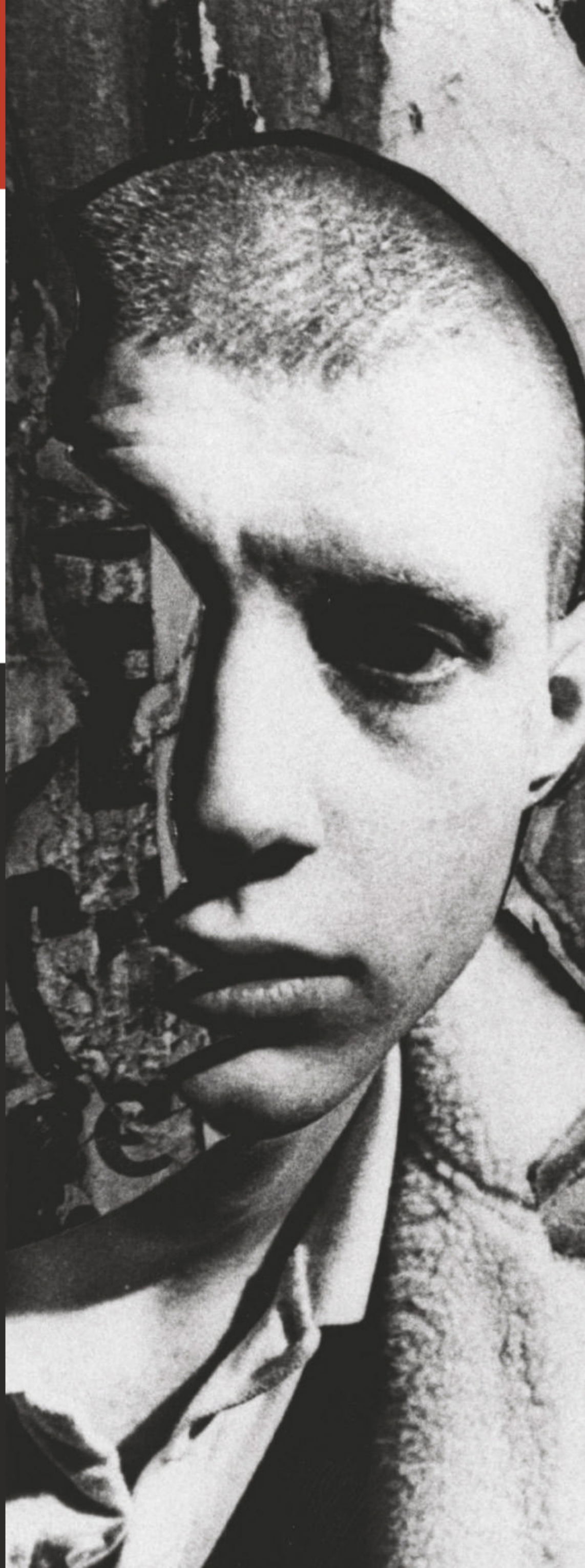
MELDING SOUL, PUNK AND POLITICS IN '80s BRITAIN, LED BY THE DRIVEN BUT COMPLICATED CHRIS DEAN, REDSKINS BATTLED FASCISTS, THEIR LABEL, AND ULTIMATELY EACH OTHER, TO THE DEATH. KEITH CAMERON UNCOVERS A TRAGICOMEDY OF INSPIRATION, IDEOLOGY AND FACTIONALISM, AND SALUTES AN INCENDIARY AND TOPICAL LEGACY: "LEFT-WING SKINHEADS?! BRILLIANT!"

» PHOTO MONTAGE: PETER ANDERSON

ON MARCH 3, 1985, THE NATIONAL UNION OF Mineworkers ended the longest industrial dispute in British history. The strike had lasted 358 days, engulfing the entire country in spasms of what occasionally felt like civil war, and ultimately failed to stop the Thatcher government's punitive programme of pit closures. "Coal Not Dole!" The miners' cry blew away in the winds of political change.

The grim outcome had already been foretold. "Leaders lead us into blind retreat/One by one we take the money, 10 by 10 we face defeat." A soul-powered exhortation to working-class consciousness, Keep On Keepin' On was the third single by the Redskins, a trio forged in the NUM's Yorkshire heartland and fronted by a scrawny stick of conviction named Chris Dean. Their goal? "Sing like The Supremes and walk like The Clash!"

Both Dean and bassist Martin Hewes were members of the UK's Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party – drummer Nick King



Like a red machine: Redskins in London, 1983 (from left) Martin Hewes, Nick King, Chris Deany.

defined himself as an anarchist – and the band a revolutionary tool. So releasing Keep On Keepin' On in November 1984 as the strike entered bitter winter was a high-stakes manoeuvre. Skilfully melding 1967 Detroit's twin currents, Motown and the MC5, the song was the band's debut for London Records, an arm of entertainment behemoth PolyGram. For the Redskins, this was their moment to open a crack in the culture, through which the revolutionary spirit could flow. "I've always hated rebel bands who want to stay in the underground," Dean said. "Get your hands dirty and get into the charts."

Keep On Keepin' On stalled at Number 43, despite a brief moment of national notoriety on November 9: its performance on Channel 4's The Tube saw a speech from Durham miner Norman Strike rendered mute, either by conspiracy or technical cock-up. Though hardly comparable to the consequences suffered by mining communities, the strike's impact on the Redskins was still profound. Devoting energies to political struggle meant less time to write songs, and when they split in late 1986, the Redskins' recorded output felt slim for a group of such ability: seven singles – highest chart position: 33 – and just one album. Dean's subsequent disappearance from the cultural barricades compounded the sense of unfulfilled potential. Yet there's an alternative perspective: pulled by contradictory forces from multiple directions – musical, ideological, personal – it's amazing the Redskins' torch burned for as long as it did.

THE NORTHERN CARNIVAL AGAINST RACISM, HELD at Potternewtown Park in Leeds on July 4, 1981, was a farewell celebration for Rock Against Racism. Established in 1976 amid outrage at Eric Clapton's infamous "throw the wogs out" speech, RAR had decided to hand on the baton. Headliners were The Specials, the flagship 2-Tone band whose single Ghost Town would soon be the UK's Number 1. ➢

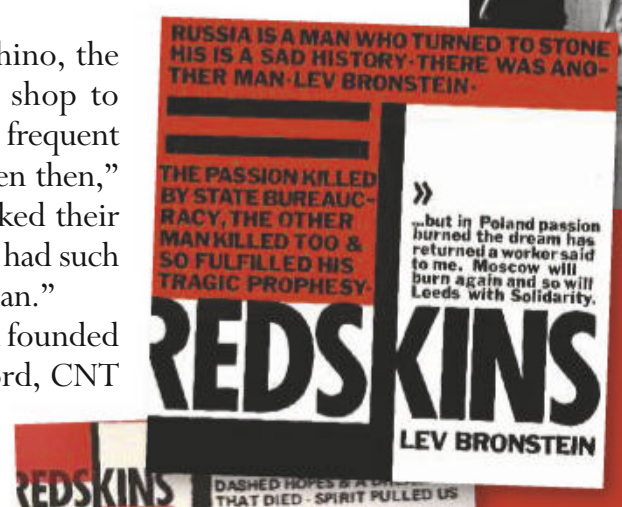
◄ Among local groups playing on lorries was a teenage trio from York, whose name exemplified RAR's cultural legacy: No Swastikas. Three lorries ahead were Leeds punk stalwarts The Mekons. "People are going, 'Come see this band, they're *left-wing* skinheads,'" recalls Mekon Jon Langford. "Left-wing skinheads?! Brilliant!"

Strictly speaking, No Swastikas had only one actual skinhead: 16-year-old bassist Martin Bottomley. "I've got big curly hair," he says today. "Even as a punk rocker, I couldn't do anything with it. So the obvious thing was shave it off. Because of 2-Tone there were a lot of skinheads into Jamaican culture who were clearly not racist. And from being involved in political campaigns, we met certain groups of people identifying themselves as 'red-skins'."

The band were active in the Anti-Nazi League, established by the SWP in 1977 specifically to counter the far-right National Front. The ANL provided organisational muscle for Rock Against Racism events, so as well as playing the Leeds Carnival, No Swastikas were stewards. "We slept on the stage," says Bottomley, "to deter anybody trying to destroy it."

Adrian Collins worked for Red Rhino, the York independent record label and shop to which 18-year-old Chris Moore was a frequent visitor. "He was a right mouthy git even then," Collins says. "I liked No Swastikas, liked their politics. Their music was raw, but they had such a lot of talent. Chris was a great frontman."

Collins left Red Rhino in 1981 and founded his own record label with Jon Langford, CNT Productions, named after Spain's anarcho-syndicalist union confederation. After singles by The Mekons, Three Johns, Sisters Of Mercy and Newtown Neurotics, in July 1982 CNT released the debut by York's pre-eminent punk skinhead trio, now renamed Redskins. A double A-side, Lev Bronstein/The Peasant Army – produced by Jon Langford at KG Studios in Bridlington – was consistent with the label's militant aspect (Langford: "Even the Sisters were big lefties") but had its own peculiar intensity. It was credited to the group's revolutionary aliases: Chris Moore chose Dean, Nick Cheel became King, while Martin Bottomley was 'Martin Leon', before settling on Hewes. "My mum's maiden name," he explains. "Chris's was the street where he lived. I have no idea why Nick chose 'King', unless because it became 'Nicking'…"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THE PASSION KILLED BY STATE BUREAUCRACY, THE OTHER MAN KILLED TOO & SO FULFILLED HIS TRAGIC PROPHESY·
»
…but in Poland passion burned the dream has returned a worker said to me. Moscow will burn again and so will Leeds with Solidarity.
REDSKINS
LEV BRONSTEIN
REDSKINS
THAT DIED - SPIRIT PULLED US THROUGH
IT'S NOT IN ORDER TO SURVIVE YOU'VE GOT TO LEAN ON ME · YOU CAN FIGHT ALONE WITHOUT SOLIDARITY· BUT BECAUSE TOGETHER WE CAN FIGHT & WIN ·
SAD SIGNS OF A SAD DESPAIR
A WILDCAT HERE &
A WILDCAT THERE
WEAK IN ISOLATION
IT'S AN OLD TALE TOLD TEN THOUSAND TIMES BUT WHILE WE'RE SPLIT WE WASTE OUR LIVES·TOGETHER WE'VE A WORLD TO WIN
DECCA
45 RPM
KEEP ON KEEPIN' ON! (DIE ON YOUR FEET-MIX)
REDSKINS
WASHINGTON
NOR MOSCOW…
REDSKINS

"I'VE ALWAYS HATED REBEL BANDS WHO WANT TO STAY IN THE UNDERGROUND. GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY AND GET INTO THE CHARTS." CHRIS DEAN

Hot to Trot: (this page, top) marching to Leeds Northern Carnival Against Racism, July 4, 1981; (above) Redskins play a miners benefit, Brixton Fridge, September 3, 1984; (left, insets) first three singles and album; (opposite page, clockwise from main) Mk2 line-up (from left) Paul Hookham, Dean, Hewes, June 1985; Hookham and Dean get organised, 1985; "Not a lot of hair but an enormous amount of talent": Muriel Gray welcomes the Redskins to The Tube, November 9, 1984 with (right) miner Norman Strike.

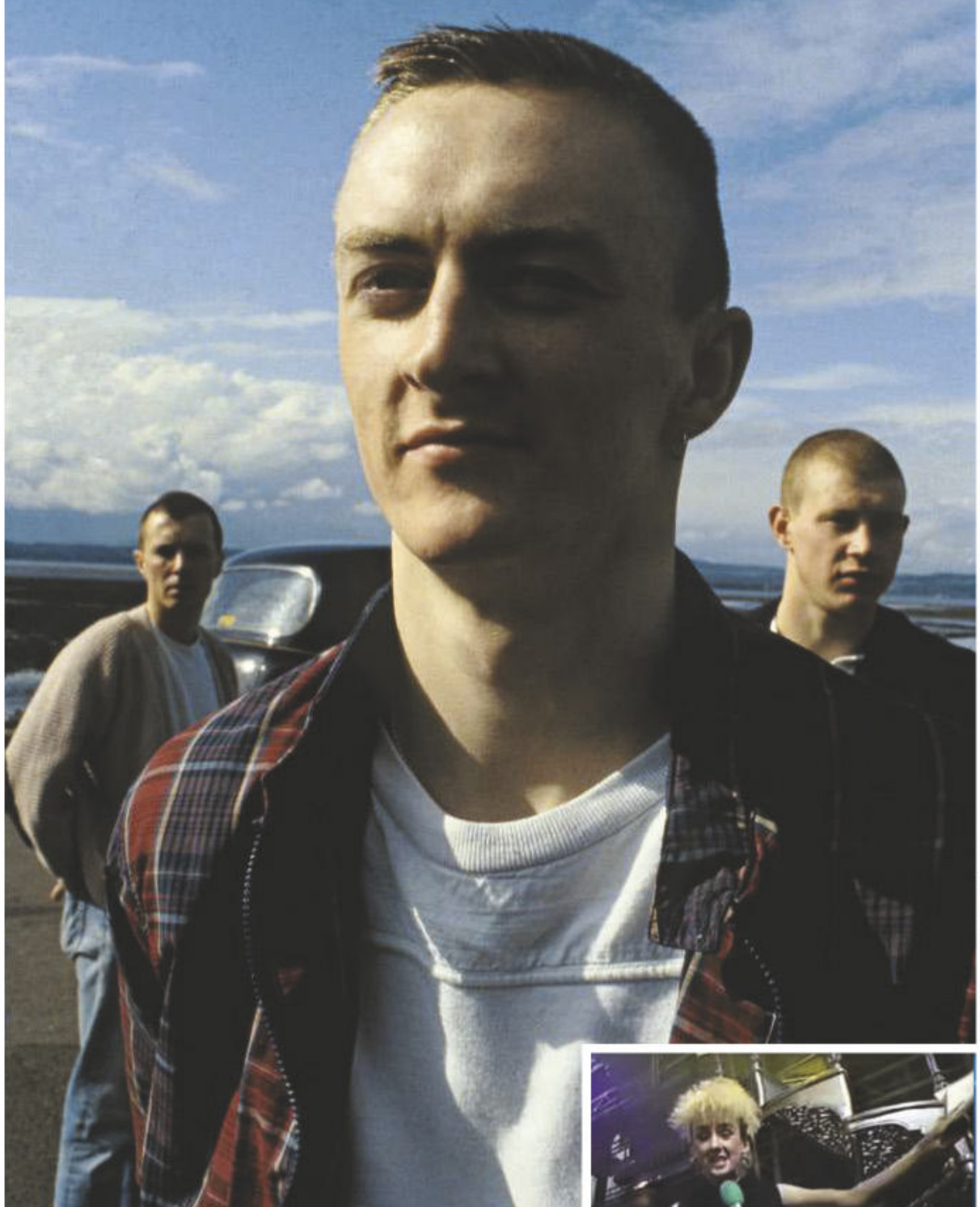
BY THE TIME THE SINGLE CAME OUT the Redskins were based in London. King had finished his political science degree at York University, while Dean already had a flat in Willesden Green, which Hewes briefly shared. The singer was now writing for NME as 'X. Moore', becoming a popular figure at the paper's Carnaby Street office. Writer Charles Shaar Murray gifted him Joe Strummer's old Fender Telecaster, and editor's assistant Karen Walter became good friends with Chris and his girlfriend Debbie. "A lovely couple," she says. "Chris was a very shy person, but very passionate, and that passion drove him out of his shyness." Paul Du Noyer, meanwhile, deployed Dean's skill for "fast graphics and vivid phrases" in producing the paper's live reviews section.

"I liked his sense of style," expands Du Noyer. "Chris reminded me of the first skinheads I'd come across in 1969, who had the austere precision of the early Mods. His look was properly put together, and he carried himself with an upright military manner. Musically he was open-minded, eager to learn. We made mix-tapes for each other: from vintage blues and soul to redneck country & western."

The Redskins prototyped their new soul vision on an October 1982 John Peel session. Two songs, Unionize and Kick Over The Statues, featured saxophonist Lloyd Dwyer and trumpeter Steve Nichol, members of Loose Ends – "the cream of British jazz-funk," Dean proudly noted. Nichol had been playing with The Jam, touring the band's final album *The Gift*. That record's key song was a Northern soul stomp, Trans Global Express, which curiously buried Paul Weller's militant lyric low in the mix. The Redskins would not be so coy. Kick Over The Statues exhilaratingly fused two of Dean's foremost inspirations, The Fall and The Four Tops: "The first act of freedom/All over the world/Is to topple the statues/Kick the bastards over!"

Arguably the most faithful studio representation of their on-stage attack, this Peel session defined the Redskins' future musical path. Second single Lean On Me! was a love song to solidarity that functioned equally well in the personal and political realms. "If you want to change society, you can't do it unless a large proportion of society want that change," says Hewes. "And the truth is, you're not going to get a larger audience by writing Unionize! Chris was very

Paul Slattery, Getty, Tom Sheehan, Peter Anderson



good at lyrics that were clearly political but which people could buy into from different perspectives."

A perfect example was Bring It Down! (This Insane Thing), a critique of capitalism set to the regretful swells of Holland-Dozier-Holland's Bernadette. Released in June 1985, it peaked at 33. But its sessions – with producers Pat Foley and Chris Silagyi – saw Nick King quit the band. Eventually replaced by Paul Hookham, King's duties on Bring It Down! were completed by The Style Council's Steve White, summoned by an SOS call from Dean to Paul Weller.

"I put my drums in the car and got over there," White recalls. "I wrote out an arrangement, learnt the song, played three or four takes. Chris said he needed it to be *driving*. I loved the passion and the politics. But for a band whose core message is, 'We're left-wing socialists – fuck you right-wing skinheads', that's a lot of pressure. I think it must have been quite a difficult band to be in."

Redskins gigs were targeted by far-right groups, though serious physical assaults were fortunately rare: at the Jobs For A Change festival on London's South Bank in June 1984, Hewes and King fought off Nazis on-stage. Internal struggle, however, proved more insidious, with King's departure symptomatic of deeper issues.

"I was never fully sure why Nick left," says Martin. "He was put under tremendous pressure by the producers we had doing Bring It Down. There was certainly an issue with money in the band – we never made any. But Chris was increasingly difficult to work with, and I don't know if that contributed to Nick's discomfort."

THE SIEGE MENTALITY INCULCATED BY THE MINERS' strike had been a source of strength; without it, insecurity and resentments grew.

"The strike drove a lot of people," says Adrian Collins. "Particularly if you lived in Yorkshire, you were living in a police state. Once the miners were defeated, I'm not sure that political drive was ever as strong again. Also, London Records did not want an overtly political revolutionary band on their label. Even though they'd signed an overtly political revolutionary band! But there were certainly tensions within. Chris and Martin would have fallen out eventually."

The nadir of the relationship with London was when the label refused to release Kick Over The Statues as a single because the band wanted to donate proceeds to South African trade unions and the ANC. Having "acquired" the master tape, the Redskins released the single independently, albeit without their name on the sleeve. "London were not happy with that coming out," says Collins. "But we were working with a capitalist pop label. There were some real tyrants there. I'm surprised the album turned out so well, really."

Titled after one of SWP founder Tony Cliff's snappier maxims, *Neither Washington Nor Moscow* ("…But International Socialism"), was finally released in April 1986. Collated from a patchwork of sessions with various producers, a restless energy still burned through the grooves of songs like Go Get Organised. The album sleeve, meanwhile, co-designed Constructivist-style by Chris Dean's sister Emma, was a portal into the singer's kinetic conceptual mind. Longtime fans were glad to have it, but sensed the Redskins had missed their window.

"The pivotal moment was when Keep On Keepin' On didn't go all the way," says radio plugger Garry Blackburn, who succeeded Adrian Collins as Redskins manager shortly before the album's release. "Everything after that was going through the motions, from a record company perspective. I remember ridiculous conversations about the Pantone number for the colour red on the album sleeve. The degree of control and detail that Chris wanted, it was ➢

RED TAPE »

BRITAIN'S LEFTIST POP INSURGENCY, 1982-85, MIXED BY KEITH CAMERON.

THE CLASH
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS
(CBS single, 1982)

"A great rock band, p'raps the greatest – but no revolutionaries," wrote X. Moore. Know Your Rights was so good the Redskins' commissar must have queried his own dogma: skull-rattling mechanoid polemic, with 'Smokin' Joe gleefully back in the ring. "Murder is a crime! Unless it was done… by a policeman!"

NEWTOWN NEUROTICS
KICK OUT THE TORIES
(CNT single, 1982)

If the new model Clash felt too avant-garde for yer local Right To Work disco, the old model was alive and screaming via the route one punk-a-rama of Steve Drewett's Harlow trio and this perennially applicable slab of provincial despair. "Evil will triumph if good men say nothing." Word.

GANG OF FOUR
I LOVE A MAN IN A UNIFORM
(EMI single, 1982)

Forged in Leeds' cauldron of Marxist art theory and street politics, post-punk pioneers GO4 were ripe for a manic pop crossover. This groovily robotic satire of militarism as impotence ("The girls, they love to see you shoot") was the perfect vehicle… until the BBC, high on Falklands jingo juice, banned it.

THE IMPOSTER
PILLS AND SOAP
(Imp/Demon single, 1983)

AKA Elvis Costello's 1983 Election Manifesto – inspired by Grandmaster Flash's The Message, a jarring exposé of GB under the hateful Thatch and her media enablers, with bonus kicks at the royals. "You think your country needs you but you know it never will." A Top 20 hit, remarkably.

THE SPECIAL AKA
RACIST FRIEND
(2-Tone, 1983)

The son of a vicar, Jerry Dammers hit his congregation hard then took them to heaven. Thus, his great gospel hosanna – (Free) Nelson Mandela, arguably the best political song ever – was preceded by this softly-skanking, hard-faced, relentless sermon. If its perspective alienates, presumably that was the intention.

WORKING WEEK
VENCEREMOS – WE WILL WIN
(Virgin single, 1984)

One year into Maggie's gloves-off second term, the student union resistance shuffle found its groove as jazz mob Working Week sagely deployed two of Britain's gentlest yet unequivocal singers in Tracey Thorn and Robert Wyatt for this bossa nova tribute to murdered Chilean singer-activist Victor Jara.

REDSKINS
REDS STRIKE THE BLUES!
(Decca B-side, 1984)

Like Link Wray hotwiring a chain-gang chant, this infernal cut saw the Redskins ably balance discipline with raw emotion. Hewes never blinks as King rolls the groove and Dean hatchets the chords to "keep those bosses on the run." All great trios are built on unity – here was one of the best.

BILLY BRAGG
BETWEEN THE WARS
(Go! Discs single, 1985)

Dedicated to the Miners' Wives Support Groups and released at the dog end of the strike, this was a peaceful man's battle hymn, reclaiming patriotism as a socialist virtue: "Sweet moderation, heart of this nation." Bragg offered hope even amid despair – the mark of a great protest singer and song.

THE STYLE COUNCIL
WALLS COME TUMBLING DOWN!
(Polydor single, 1985)

Two months after playing on the Redskins' Bring It Down!, Steve White was at Live Aid powering this class war tub thumper. "They take the profits, you take the blame": Paul Weller's hand was in the revolutionary fire and he didn't flinch.

THE HOUSEMARTINS
FLAG DAY
(Go! Discs single, 1985)

Wearing their Mao caps jauntily while whistling beezer tunes would make the Hull quartet stars, but this debut was a mug of stewed tea served from the Grimethorpe colliery band's samovar. "Too many Florence Nightingales, not enough Robin Hoods," sang Paul Heaton, every soggy liberal's nightmare.

insane. But he was an enigma, a contradiction. He was murky about his background, the fact that he went to private school on a scholarship. He was mysterious, and he cultivated that. But a great pop star. A red Harrington and boxing boots have never looked better on anybody."

Compounding everything was the band's problematic relationship with their political motherlode. Trotsky himself had doubted whether a proletarian culture independent of the ruling class was possible; ergo, the SWP leaders didn't accept pop music as an agent of social change. Participating in a debate at the SWP's annual Marxism festival, Chris Dean sarcastically stated: "Of course, no one has ever joined the SWP because of the Redskins…"

"*Very* sarcastically," says Martin. "Throughout the debate, about 40 people raised their hands and said the Redskins were *exactly* why they joined. The SWP was dominated by a group of predominantly middle-class intellectuals whose definition of culture is high culture. 'Get a proper job' – that was their attitude. I drifted out of the SWP for a number of reasons. But I started to understand that people [there] are not connected to the way the world works."

JANUARY 1986. BILLY BRAGG ARRIVED AT MELODY Maker's office for a pop star debate about Red Wedge, the newly formed organisation of musicians and entertainers dedicated to electing a Labour government. It was barely a month since he'd been singing Back In The USSR at an anti-apartheid benefit with two of his fellow panelists, Jerry Dammers and Chris Dean. Now, however, along with Dammers, Paul Weller and Labour MP Clare Short, Bragg found himself on the opposite side of the table from Dean, who in a grotesque contortion of the old political doctrine 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', sat next to Conservative MP Greg Knight and The Police's Stewart Copeland. Although by now accustomed to Dean teasing him about being Labour leader Neil Kinnock's "publicity officer", Bragg was aghast.

"Rather than people who were huge supporters of the Labour Party, Red Wedge was a collection of people who were fundamentally opposed to Margaret Thatcher," says Bragg. "And the Redskins were certainly that. But they always held themselves apart, because of the [SWP] party line. That was a shame. It was embarrassing for me when they had a go at me, but it was *ridiculous* when Chris is on the other side of the table with a bloody Tory. I'm like, Chris, what are you fucking doing?!"

May 1986 saw one last Redskins single, It Can Be Done, a two-year-old song already on the album now released "under duress", according to the sleevenote. Despite clear signs of ennui, the power of the band's live performances actually intensified, be it during June's residency at the Harlesden Mean Fiddler or the huge Concert SOS Racisme at Place de la Bastille in Paris. Television footage shows the Redskins completely at ease before an audience of 200,000. After a rendering of Wilson Pickett's Ninety-Nine And A Half (Won't Do) segued into Keep On Keepin' On, Dean marches off, tossing his guitar to a crew member with a practised flourish. It's the exit of someone who'd made up his mind.

After a final show in Munich on September 15, Dean announced he no longer wanted to play gigs, prompting a fatal schism. "I saw gigs as our workplace," says Martin. "That's where we communicated with people. Chris and I had a good chat, but it wasn't up for debate, he'd made his decision. So that's why I left. Part of the problem Chris created for himself was he forgot we were a band."

The split was made public in January 1987. SWP newspaper Socialist Worker ran an article, "A Rock And Roll Socialist Fantasy Ends!", written by Martin Bottomley with Steven Wells, erstwhile ranting poet and NME colleague of Chris Dean. "Pop stars occasionally need to be told how egotistical they are. It helps keep their feet on the ground. With the Redskins it happened far too seldom."

QUICKLY, CHRIS DEAN BEGAN TO DISAPPEAR FROM view. In April of '87, NME reported rumours of the singer's next project, variously called P-Mod, Soul Funk Sex & The P-Modettes, and Chris Dean & The Crystallites. But nothing was ever released. As far as is known, his final public performance was

"IT WAS *RIDICULOUS* WHEN CHRIS IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TABLE WITH A BLOODY TORY. I'M LIKE, CHRIS, WHAT ARE YOU FUCKING DOING?!" **BILLY BRAGG**

Which side are you on: (above) peace breaks out at Melody Maker's Red Wedge Debate, January 1986 (from left) Jerry Dammers, Billy Bragg, Stewart Copeland, Chris Dean; (above left) pickets and police battle at Orgreave coking plant, June 1984; (left) Thatcher, her plate full of hate; (insets) Redskins 45s.

in Trevor Griffiths' play Oi For England at London's Central School of Speech and Drama in 1988. Student Richard Whitehead had doorstepped him in Willesden Green and asked the former Redskin to appear in a scene he was directing for his degree course. Dean played Finn, guitarist in a Manchester skinhead punk group recruited by a sinister *agent provocateur* to play a Nazi rally. The only dissenting member, Finn ultimately destroys the band's equipment. Fellow actor Mark Hosking, later a member of garage rockers The Flaming Stars, remembers watching in awe as Dean smashed up his guitar.

"He was very impressive, took it to heart. Like, 'This is me. I am fighting back against the fascists, when all around are caving in.' We didn't talk about the Redskins at all until we'd done the production. But over a few beers, I 'fessed up to being a massive fan and Chris just gave a little smile. I saw him again six months afterwards. I was on a demonstration, and there he was, selling Socialist Worker. He wouldn't talk about anything other than me buying a copy of the paper. That was very much him. His guard rarely came down."

It seems Chris Dean almost never permitted the public to see much of Chris Moore, but a 1986 Sounds interview was unusually revealing of his background. When Chris was seven, his artilleryman father died of a brain tumour. "Ever since my dad died, I admit I've been quite cold when it comes to breaking up relationships with girlfriends or people. I won't admit to being hurt even if I am. This is probably all show, because I don't feel cold inside – completely the opposite, in fact."

Martin Bottomley hasn't seen or spoken to his former bandmate since the day he left the Redskins. Through a mutual friend, he knows Dean is in York, having lived in Paris in the late '80s after starting a relationship with a woman who worked for the band's French record label. "I might be wrong but I'm sure they had a child," Bottomley says. "I have a reasonable idea of where he's living, and me and my friend did think of knocking on his door and surprising him. I'd love to see him. We went through a lot together and I just want to know that he's happy."

In 2015, concert promoter Adrian Gibson contacted Bottomley, offering to set up a Redskins tour: "Make up a figure and I'll pay it." Martin reached out to Paul Hookham, who spoke to Chris. A week later, an e-mail: "It's not going to happen." Yet Gibson remains optimistic, insisting "I've reformed bands you would never think could get back together."

Currently a music teacher at a London college, Martin Bottomley winces slightly at the concept of a Redskins reunion. "I'm really decrepit – I'd have to train," he laughs. "Occasionally a student will say they looked us up on YouTube – 'Wow sir, your band was really good.' And I think we were – but it's really pleasing that a younger generation says that. I'd be up for it."

A forthcoming 4-CD edition of *Neither Washington Nor Moscow* features a sleevenote by Paul Hookham, poignantly locating the band's place in the ongoing drama of history: "What makes this material strong is Chris's lyrics and their enduring relevance. Then, as today, there was the lack of opportunity, money and fear of unemployment. What the band did was exciting; for one night only and night after night…"

In 2020, kicking over statues accrued fresh political currency across the world. When the bronze effigy of Edward Colston, Tory MP and slave-trader, was plunged into Bristol harbour on June 7, you'd like to think a certain man in York allowed himself a smile. Ⓜ

Thanks to Mark 'Bazza' Barrett, Stuart Deabill and Wendy May. The expanded edition of Neither Washington Nor Moscow is out in autumn 2021 on London.

Tom Sheehan, Getty (2)

THE TROGGS UNLEASH WILD THING

Straight out of Andover in deepest Hampshire, REG PRESLEY's earthy proto-punks were desperate for their shot. Then, in 1966, they put a little bit of fairy dust over a CHIP TAYLOR howl of urgent lust, and had a smash on both sides of the pond. More hits followed, but ground down on the road in Europe, and too late to the British invasion, their fire soon burned out. "We didn't have time to think," they say. "The girls were always screaming."

Interviews by **LOIS WILSON** • Portrait by **TONY GALE**

Chris Britton: There were two bands in Andover, Ten Feet Five, which me and Pete Staples were in, and The Troggs, with Reg Balls and Ronnie Bullis. Both fell to pieces around the same time in late '64, so we came together. Reg and the original line-up had made a demo tape which included a version of The Kinks' You Really Got Me. He took it around Denmark Street and someone suggested he take it to Larry Page, who managed The Kinks. Larry liked it but thought that incarnation of the group was rough around the edges and said come back in a year's time.

Larry Page: A year to the day, they came back to the office. I admired their tenacity. Reg had written a song called Lost Girl. I liked it, booked them into [Regent Sound] studio to record it. I liked Reg, he was unique, he was also nice.

Making everything groovy: in patriotic mood, The Troggs, 1966 (from left): Pete Staples, Reg Presley, Ronnie Bond and Chris Britton.

Tony Gale/Alamy

Close to the Reg (clockwise from above): on-stage in Manchester; with their Big Hit; Presley with Larry Page (right); making off with free clobber from Sid Brent; Wild Thing 45s on Atco *and* Fontana.

"THEY WERE JUST 'F'-ING AND BLINDING AT EACH OTHER ALL THE WAY THROUGH, 'F' THIS, 'F' THAT."

Chris Britton

Derek Preston/Paul Popper/Popperfoto/Getty,Mirrorpix/Getty, Getty (7)

Pete was a solid bass player, Ronnie could pound the drums like no one else, Chris was good too.

Pete Staples: Our co-manager Stan Phillips had a fitting business and we rehearsed in his workshop. It was huge, full of workbenches and machinery, and freezing cold. The single was released on CBS in February '66 and got a few plays on Radio Luxembourg. It was enough to get us excited.

Keith Altham: I was working at the NME and Larry rang me up, saying, "I've got this great little band from Andover but their names are a bit pedestrian. I've changed the drummer's name to Bond after James Bond, the guitarist is Britton so that's nice and butch, but the singer I've got a problem with – his name is Reginald Winston Balls." I said, "Call him Presley, Larry." He said, "All right," and I said, "I'm only joking, you can't seriously call him Reg Presley." Next week Reg picks up the NME and reads how The Troggs have got this singer called Reg Presley. He thinks someone else has joined and rings Larry up to complain.

CB: Reg was very pushy, very upfront, and on his say-so we forced ourselves on Larry. We collected all our thruppenny bits together and each of us phoned him every day from the local phone box, four calls a day. I think he felt he had to do something to pacify us.

LP: I had a meeting with April Blackwood Music in America. I asked them if they had any demos. They gave me a few titles, one of which was Wild Thing. I liked it straight away.

Chip Taylor: I was writing some rock'n'roll type things, quite raw, simple, very catchy. I'd got a call about a song for a group called The Wild Ones. I started banging out these chords on my old Kay guitar and the words started coming out, "Wild thing you make my heart sing/You make everything groovy." I had a session booked that afternoon. I loved it, but the whole thing sounded so sexual, I was embarrassed to let people hear it. I went to the studio the next day and took the acetates off the shelf and hid them.

PS: Larry sent Wild Thing down to us in Andover to rehearse, along with a song by The Lovin' Spoonful called Did You Ever Have To Make Up Your Mind.

CB: Larry had a session booked at Olympic Studios with the Larry Page Orchestra. He got us to drive up to London on the off chance there would be some time left over for us to record. Just outside Andover the van seized up. The throttle linkage broke and Reg had to operate the accelerator from the passenger seat, we had to tie the carburettor in with a bit of string, and it needed two people to turn the steering wheel. But we made it, loaded in and in 20 minutes put down Wild Thing, With A Girl Like You, which Reg had written, and Go Home. So, a [UK] Number 2 and Number 1 single *and* a B side.

LP: I came out of the studio very, very excited but I was the only one. I went round the BBC and every producer hated Wild Thing. I was walking down Bond Street and I bumped into [producer] Brian Wiley. I told him, "I'm pissed off. I've got a hit record and no one will play it." He was sitting in on Saturday Club that week. He put it in the show without even hearing it and it took off like a rocket.

PS: I was working as an electrician putting a light switch on the wall of a house when the DJ on the radio said, "At Number 8, The Troggs!" I thought, "What am I doing here?" That evening we crammed in the phone box and rang Larry, asked if we should pack our jobs in. From then on, he worked us hard.

KA: The band were getting big and needed an image, and Larry was reading the News Of The World and saw an article about these stripy suits for sale in Sid Brent's Take 6 boutique in Carnaby Street. Larry got the idea to say that Sid Brent had bet the group a thousand pounds' worth of gear from the shop if Wild Thing got in the Top 5. So they got some clothes, Sid got some publicity.

PS: We wore the stripy suits on the front of the album [1966's *From Nowhere*]. Of course, Larry said why not be photographed in caves because of the troglodyte connection? So we went to the Cheddar Caves in Somerset. It was fun. It was always fun at that time, hard work but fun.

CB: We recorded the album live in three and a half hours, and it was pretty much like [notorious 1970 in-studio swearathon] The Troggs Tapes – when Reg and Ronnie got together, they said the 'f' word every other word. They were just 'f'-ing and blinding at each other all the way through, 'f' this, 'f' that… but it got done.

KA: Larry and I were always cooking up stunts, most of them involving animals because of Wild

All lioned up: (from left) Bond, Britton, big cat Marquess, Staples and Presley at the Marquee Club, London, November 10, 1967; (inset) more chart smashes.

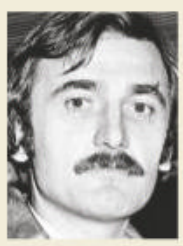
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

● **Chris Britton (Troggs guitarist)**

● **Pete Staples (Troggs bassist)**

● **Larry Page (Troggs manager/ producer)**

● **Chip Taylor (writer, Wild Thing)**



● **Keith Altham (journalist, NME)**

Thing. There was a photo shoot at Berlin zoo, and then there was the time Mary Chipperfield of Chipperfield's Circus brought Marquess The Lion to the Marquee Club. The group were supposedly recording a song called The Lion and needed to record a lion's roar. Mary and the lion took the stage. A mike was placed in front of the lion to make it look realistic for photos, the lion licked the mike and someone must have stupidly switched it on, as Marquess got a shock off it and he went crazy. Everyone ran for the exit. It was chaos, but they got a great story.

PS: For that first year after we hit, we had no break. We didn't have time to think, it was seven days a week, press, TV, radio, recording, then of course travelling to and from and playing all the shows. The girls were always screaming and wetting themselves at our performances. There'd be puddles down the front. We did the same circuit as the Small Faces, and after one show I asked the caretaker how we compared puddle-wise – he said about the same. But we were really dead on our feet.

LP: I was looking after Sonny And Cher. They were in London and Sonny called [Atlantic producer] Jerry Wexler and said, "Larry's really excited, he thinks he's got a big hit." Jerry got me on the phone, told me to send the song over. I sent him Wild Thing and With A Girl Like You, then phoned him a week later. He said, "Rubbish" and that was it. I then met with Fontana, they loved it and we did a deal. The minute Fontana got airplay, all of a sudden Jerry puts the record out on Atco with With A Girl Like You on the B-side. They claimed there was a verbal contract which was utter bullshit. There was no deal. We had a Number 1 in the US with Wild Thing, and at the same time we had With A Girl Like You at Number 1 in the UK [in August 1966].

CT: The Wild Ones' version just didn't capture the base, guttural nature of Wild Thing. The Troggs' version did. I was at the swimming pool with my son when it came on the radio and it sounded great. They'd captured the feel of the demo but added magic. Jimi Hendrix's version did the same. He loved The Troggs' version so much he covered it at Monterey and from that moment Wild Thing became a part of rock'n'roll history.

PS: The problems really started when Wild Thing went to Number 1 in the States, on two different labels. We never got to tour there until '68. It felt like we missed the boat.

LP: As for America, I knew so many bands getting ripped off out there. You'd be playing a venue which had a bill of 20 bands a day, you'd go on and play two songs then wait four hours and play another two songs. It was ludicrous to tour the US with only one hit. Even though we were Number 1, we weren't getting played on New York radio.

CB: The work schedule eventually took its toll. With A Girl Like You had got to Number 1 in August, I Can't Control Myself was Number 2 in October, then we released Any Way That You Want Me, another Chip Taylor song. We did Ready Steady Go! to promote it. We were just off a 21-date tour of Germany with Los Bravos, two shows a day, Reg's voice was knackered and he had to sing this soft, gentle ballad. His voice was like sandpaper. On the same show that week, Jimi Hendrix made his TV debut with Hey Joe and blew everyone away.

PS: [Number 5 hit] Love Is All Around was the pinnacle of '67. When we finally got to the States in '68 [they played dates with The Who in spring and summer], there was still no money. [In early 1969] I brought it up with the band, we arranged a meeting with Larry, the band were all a bit quiet in the car on the way up and when we got there Larry said how the band wanted me to leave. Reg was really nasty. He was a rat, said, "If you don't go I won't sing any more," and I thought, After all we've been through. That was that.

CB: Love Is All Around was our last hit. We never had time to think about what we were doing, we were always just doing it. And then it was over. We stumbled on, but it became all about these long, drawn out, contrived guitar solos, and I eventually left in '72 to set up some nightclubs in Portugal. There were no hard feelings. It just felt the right time to go.

LOST IN SPACE

Formed half a century ago in the crucible of rock and soul, **BIG STAR** would become legends, but not before their visionary founder, **Chris Bell**, lost his way, his band, and his life. "You can always tell the pioneers because they're the guys with the arrows in their backs," discovers Memphis insider **Robert Gordon**.

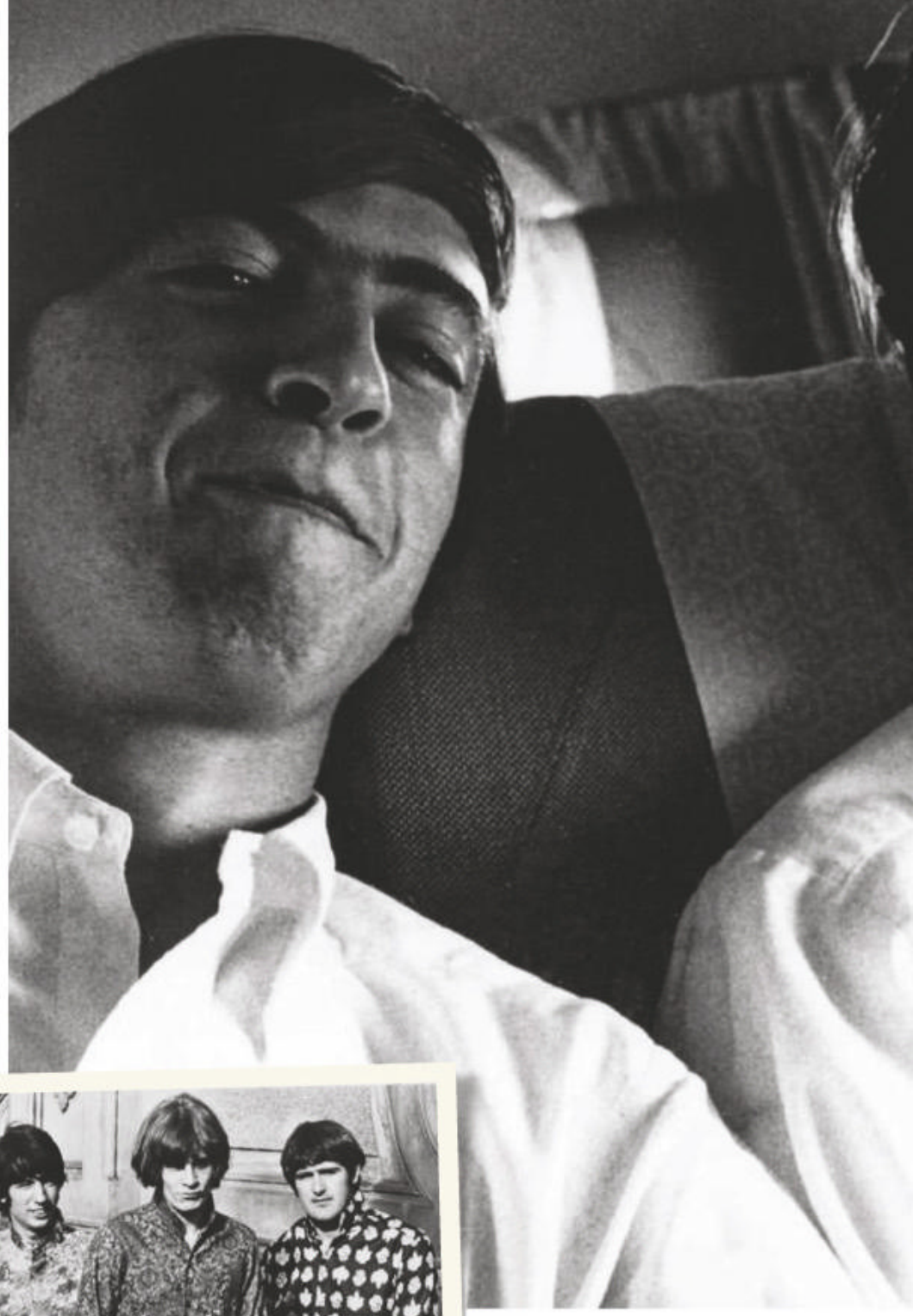
AF Archive, Alamy Stock Photo/Nothng CAn Hurt Me (2012)

“The more you learn, the less you know”: Big Star, 1971 (from left) Alex Chilton, Jody Stephens, Chris Bell, Andy Hummel.

IN THE EARLY 1970s, THE RELATIVE backwoods of Memphis had already seen local heroes become legends. And beyond the hits flying out of Sun and Stax there was a thriving arts scene, a bohemia that fostered music, painting and writing. Big Star founder Chris Bell did not grow up in that scene. His father owned a popular restaurant and later several chains of them. The Bells were a good Christian family, and that religious leaning would comfort Chris – when it didn't haunt him.

His future bandmate Alex Chilton *did* grow up in that scene. His mom had an art gallery in their house and his trumpet-playing father owned a stage lighting company. I don't believe the rumours that photographer Bill Eggleston, a Chilton family friend, gave the 13-year old Alex peyote, but you never know; the bohos were grinding it regularly in the supermarket coffee grinders.

When I met Chilton in the early 1990s, he was dismissive of Big Star and mostly remained so. He told me "that kind of guitar playing is something that's there on a guitar neck and anybody who reaches a certain level of guitar playing is going to play that same stuff anyway." Because he was on all three Big Star albums, I thought of the band as his – his at least as much as Bell's. But reconsidering their history on the 50th anniversary of the group's formation, I find that taking Chilton at his word helps the story fall into place.



CHRIS BELL'S MOTHER was English. Of her six children, Chris, the fifth, was the first born in America. He considered himself half-English, which contributed to the outsiderness he felt all his life. He may also have been sexually fluid, which in the 1960s and '70s would have been further isolating. He was inclined toward the arts, and he possessed – or would develop – a keen sense of soundscapes, of sonic dimensions, but it was The Beatles on Ed Sullivan in February '64 that first gave his musical appreciation a focus. With his high school pal Bill Cunningham, he formed a British Invasion cover band, The Jynx (rhymes with Kinks), who gigged at high school parties most weekends, which is where they first encountered freshman Alex Chilton. Less than two years later, Chilton and Cunningham would score a worldwide Number 1 hit as The Box Tops with The Letter. Chilton left high school and toured. For the next three years, he played arenas and large halls, appeared in teen magazines and on television, developed as a songwriter and became comfortable in a recording studio.

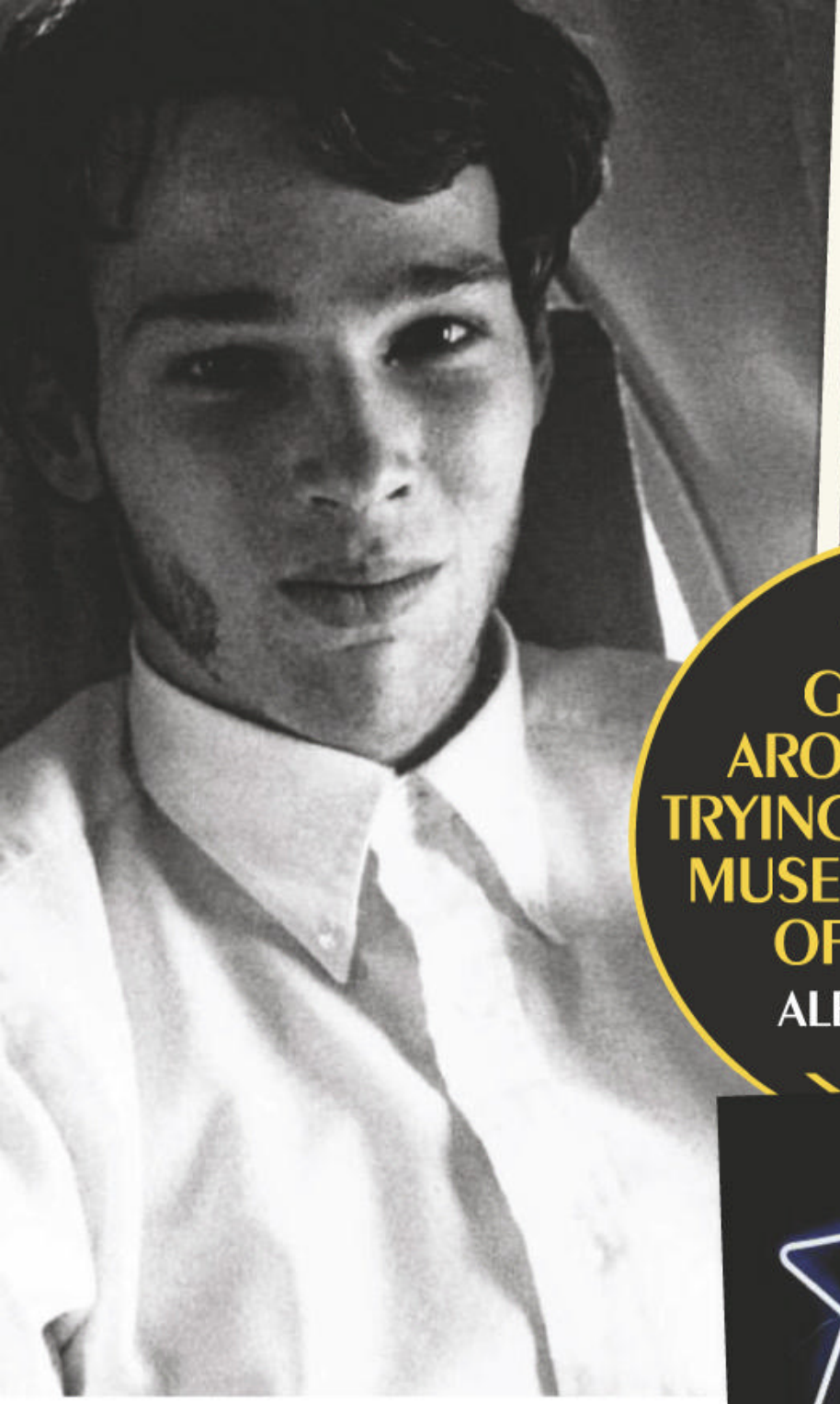
Bell tooled around Memphis, forming another band in 11th grade with drummer Steve Rhea, and they started hanging out at an expanding local studio, Ardent. One night, the studio's founder and owner John Fry came across Bell in his office. "Chris was sitting in my chair behind my desk," he would tell writer Rich Tupica. "He had his boots on my desk and was smoking a cigarette. I was like, Whoa, who's *this* guy?"

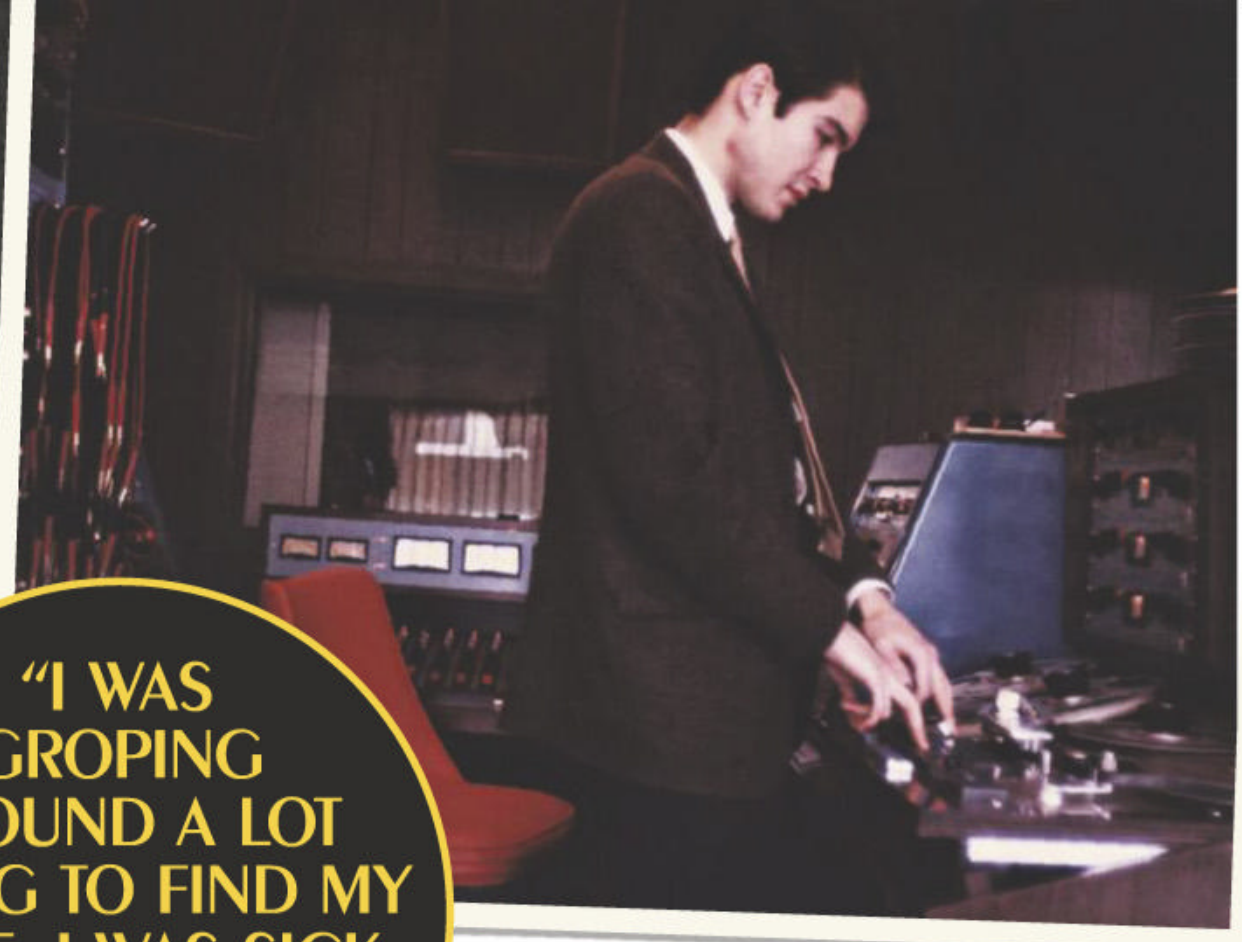
Fry had established Ardent in 1959, when not doing his homework in 10th grade. He was bright, meticulous, and adventuresome enough to resist the appeal of his father's building materials business. In 1966, he established Ardent's first commercial location. By then, the backhouse gang included Terry Manning, a multi-instrumentalist who'd left El Paso, Texas, and a spot in The Bobby Fuller Four – just before they cut I Fought The Law.

Bell was soon recording during the studio's off hours, and grew tight with another kid in his prep school class who cared a lot about music and photography and not much else – Andy Hummel. He remembered accompanying Bell and mutual friend Michael O'Brien to meet Chilton at his parents' house on July 20, 1969, the day of the first lunar landing. The kids took purple haze acid and watched for moon creatures on black and white television. That fall, Hummel and Bell headed across Tennessee to Knoxville and the state university. But they did not return for their second year, enrolling instead at Memphis State – more convenient for Ardent, where the team had worked with not only Isaac Hayes and Sam And Dave but also, through Terry Manning's connections, Led Zeppelin. Fry and Manning were getting a lot of work and needed help, so Fry told the college punks hanging around that, if they wanted to stay, they should attend his new, free, Saturday morning engineering class.

"Fry would stand in front of a blackboard and teach," Richard Rosebrough, the Ardent engineer who'd drum on some later Big Star sessions, told me. "You could show up drunk, and you could

Courtesy Frank Bruno, Courtesy Ardent Studios/Omnivore Recordings





"I WAS GROPING AROUND A LOT TRYING TO FIND MY MUSE. I WAS SICK OF BANDS."
ALEX CHILTON

Fire and ice: (left) Andy Hummel and Chris Bell in 1969; (above) producer John Fry spools the tape in the control room at Ardent Studios, National Street, Memphis; (opposite page) The Box Tops, New York, 1968 (from left) Rick Allen, Jerry Riley, Bill Cunningham, Alex Chilton, Thomas Boggs.

get drunk with the teacher after class. But you had to show up."

Graduates were given keys to the studio. Hummel and Bell had finally found a class they liked.

ALTHOUGH ARDENT WAS BOOMING, John Fry had an unrealised ambition.

"He loved radio and he loved great pop records," said Rosebrough. "He always wanted to record his own like Phil Spector and George Martin, but what he needed was somebody to record."

Meanwhile, Bell played on Terry Manning's solo album, *Home Sweet Home*, and they formed Icewater with Steve Rhea and Hummel on bass. They began developing original songs, and when Rhea shifted to guitar, Hummel got a former bandmate to keep time; Jody Stephens had attracted attention when he'd drummed for Memphis State University's production of Hair. "There were lots of bands playing blues rock," says Stephens today. "But I wasn't aware of other bands doing what we were doing – Badfinger, Beatles, maybe Todd Rundgren. We were either behind the times or in front of a movement, but hell, we were just doing music we enjoyed doing."

Icewater cut a three-song demo at Ardent and Bell and Rhea took it to New York to find a deal. They came home disappointed, labelled by one exec as "Beatles wannabes".

In New York, Bell stayed with Alex Chilton. Since quitting The Box Tops, the latter had immersed himself in the New York folk scene, learning acoustic guitar and anticipating a troubadour's independence. "I was groping around a lot trying to find my muse," said Chilton in Holly George-Warren's biography, A Man Called Destruction. "I was sick of bands. I figured I was going to learn to accompany myself so that I wouldn't even need 'em." The two musicians jammed and the beauty of their voices enmeshing escaped neither. They agreed to play together again.

Something like the music of Big Star was forming in Bell's head. Back in Memphis, he, Stephens and Tom Eubanks, as Rock City, wrote and recorded My Life Is Right, a ballad with a jangly acoustic guitar foundation that gets pretty riled up with drums and electric guitars, yet somehow never strays from its soft foundation. And they developed Try Again, which stays less riled, more acoustic. Big Star's later versions mimic their demos.

Chilton visited Memphis, possibly for the Christmas holidays, 1970, and went to a VFW hall where Bell, Stephens and Hummel were playing. Their retro sound struck a chord. "The music that first really captured me was mid-'60s British pop music, two-and-a-half or three minutes, really appealing songs," Chilton told me in 1994. "I've always aspired to that same format."

Chilton went with Bell to Ardent, and since Chris could engineer they cut Alex's Watch The Sunrise, another acoustic number that could welcome harmony vocals and a gentle band backing. Chilton also played him In The Street and Ballad Of El Goodo.

On the one hand, between the two of them they had half an album. On the other hand, it was all throwback pop, not much of the folk, bluegrass or R&B that Chilton was favouring. Bell had keys to the studio and they both had lots more ideas. And so Chilton moved back to Memphis and joined Bell's band.

Early 1971, Big Star had formed.

"BELL'S BAND" – IN A WAY, THAT'S THE RUB (OR *a* rub, because distribution would prove to be the other one). Bell had assembled the players and invited Alex. In retrospective interviews, Chilton sometimes referred to it as Chris's band, noting the ways Big Star's DNA differed from his own.

"They were oriented toward mid-'60s British Invasion music," he told writer Steve Harris, in an interview quoted by Rich Tupica. "The group was designed to play that kind of music, which left out a lot of things I liked to do. For me, there was a lot of jazz music and a lot of black music that I love. Those two categories were pretty much left out of Big Star." But the harmonies (Hummel also sang) and the guitar interplay couldn't be denied, and the studio rental rate – free – couldn't be beat.

"In the studio it was Chris's band," confirms Jody Stephens. ➢

"IN THE STUDIO IT WAS CHRIS'S BAND. I'M SURE ALEX PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE, BUT IT WAS CHRIS'S VISION."
JODY STEPHENS

Michael O'Brien (2), John Fry/Courtesy Ardent Studios/Omnivore Recordings

"Chris was producer in terms of parts and arrangements. John Fry was the sonic enabler. I'm sure Alex played a major role, but it was Chris's vision in where he wanted to take that music."

The quartet would rehearse and record at Ardent. One evening, the finished songs piling up, they were outside enjoying the breeze, trying to conjure a band name. The hamburger stand across the street was called the Sweden Kreme. Next to it was a supermarket named Big Star. The presumptuousness made them laugh, and they embraced it.

When Big Star wasn't at the studio, Chris was. Days at Ardent were devoted to paying clients, but Bell, with his key, was there many nights, arriving in the dark and leaving in the light, honing the good parts, layering tracks, harmonies and instrumental fills. He hid Easter eggs everywhere: a quick harmonica riff, revving motorcycles, things to make the listener smile. John Fry stayed close: he was Bell's mentor and Bell was Fry's protégé – the sound of the album had become a love that they were sharing. "The record has lasted in part due to the way Fry captured that music," says Stephens. "It sparkles. It's dynamic, a joy to hear." Full of hope, and about half in jest, they called it *#1 Record*.

It's an exuberant work, rich with excitement and liberation, with a touch of humour and some kind of big ache at its core. It's simultaneously mature beyond its years but built around a teenage wistfulness. Bell's Feel, the opening track, captures many of the album's strengths. A distorted guitar playing softly eases us in, layers revealed by a contrasting, clean, bent-string guitar. You can't really tell if it's a slow dance or a headbanger's ball. The latent power is unleashed with Bell's vocal, a high, semi-exasperated tone: "Girlfriend, what are you doing?" The answer: "You're driving me to ruin." The music is dense but the mix is exacting – everything can be heard individually. Bell mixed his own voice with heavy reverb, like he was in an arena hearing it bounce off the distant walls and high ceilings. The song is heavy and it's light. It's fully realised, immediately engaging.

Chilton's intimate The Ballad Of El Goodo follows. "Years ago my heart was set to live," the 21 year-old begins, and as the song unfolds it's both about pursuing love and reclaiming one's childhood from an exploitative industry. Stephens' drums manage to have real *oomph* without destroying the intimacy.

Despite the success of its rockers – Don't Lie To Me, with its screaming Chilton vocal and Southern boogie undertones; In The Street, covered by Cheap Trick for That '70s Show theme song – more than half of *#1 Record* leans acoustic. Chilton's Thirteen is the eerie highlight, the epitome of young love longing. (Later in life, Chilton said his Big Star songs were the reclamation of the teenage mindset he'd left for the glare of footlights and Box Tops success.)

The finished record had a sound of its own. It strongly evoked the bright crispness of The Beatles, the country rock of the later Byrds, and an occasional touch of Memphis soul. Bell had pulled off superior work, affirming his natural instincts. He attended the mastering session, a complex affair because Fry was pushing the technology's limits.

"We worked on that all day," mastering engineer Larry Nix told your writer. "John Fry was very particular." Bell had Nix carve into the runout groove, 'The more you learn the less you know.' Then Bell asked to hold the engraving knife.

"I gave it to him and he dangled it above the day's work and then let it fall," recalls Nix. "That sucker pierced the new master." Bell was not invited to the redo.

FINISHED IN DECEMBER 1971, *#1 Record* was slated for an April '72 release on Fry's Ardent Records label. Bell and Fry celebrated by travelling to Australia for a vacation, but the sweetness of the moment would soon turn sour.

The spring release was delayed when Fry assigned to Stax the manufacturing, merchandising and distribution rights to his label. The companies already had a strong alliance – and since Stax didn't yet have any white stars, and since Ardent was handling its own promotions, the deal was full of opportunity. Plus, as Stax's Al Bell probably told Fry, he was intending to change Stax's distribution from its successful patchwork of indies to a deal with Columbia, the largest distributor of records in the world. When the Stax deal was announced in March of 1972, Big Star were touted as Ardent's next big thing and the album release was pushed to summer.

The delay created an interminable wait. With the record complete, Bell had a lot more time. Pot and pills filled the hours. "Christopher was getting whacked out," said Richard Rosebrough. "We all were. We're all drinking, taking downs, puke on the floor."

Big Star rehearsed, but the inactivity allowed underlying tensions to surface. At one rehearsal, Hummel couldn't nail a bass riff and Bell badgered him until Hummel put down his bass and headed for the door. But Bell had to needle him again and Hummel turned, stepped toward Bell and socked him in the nose.

So Bell broke Hummel's bass into three pieces.

So Hummel went to Bell's car and poked holes in his guitar with a screwdriver.

So Bell went to the music store and bought a new guitar and charged it to Hummel.

Along with minor squabbles, they had big ideas. Big Star had never really played live, and since The Beatles hadn't needed to gig, they thought they might not have to either. And when they accepted they'd tour, their thinking defaulted to arenas. Ardent laid out an advance against royalties for British HiWatt amplifiers, the kind The Who used in their stadium shows.

"They had these grandiose ideas," recalled Rosebrough. "John Fry was a pilot. The plan was that John would buy a Lockheed Constellation and Big Star would tour around the country, and

Nothing can hurt us: Chris Bell, Andy Hummel, Jody Stephens and Alex Chilton at Ardent Studio, 1971; (inset right) Bell in the street; (opposite page, from top) Chilton and Bell in the studio; rave reviews for *#1 Record* highlighted in a 1972 Ardent newspaper advertisement; the mispressed Ardent single of Don't Lie To Me, which played Thirteen instead.

this thing above the stage would drop gold stars on the band while they played and they would get on the cover of Rolling Stone."

When the album was finally released at the end of summer 1972, Ardent's John King and Stephen Rhea worked the phones and sent out promo copies. The record was different enough to get attention, and the reviews were good. The first single was a two-sided rocker with When My Baby's Beside Me on top and In The Street on the flip. Rolling Stone compared the band to Raspberries and Badfinger, but better, and said that Todd Rundgren had yet to create an album as impressive. Many reviews cited Chilton, a performer they knew from The Box Tops, and neglected to mention the architect of the album's sound. "I think Chris was really dissatisfied with living in Alex's shadow," says Stephens. "The press we were getting was spotlighting Alex because Alex was a bridge to the reader."

THE MOST FATEFUL DISAPPOINTMENT WAS THE ONE that held the greatest promise. Just after Stax released the album, it closed the deal with Columbia. While the two companies figured out how to dance, *#1 Record* was barely distributed. Ardent's promotional department secured the rave reviews, but interested customers could not find the album in stores.

There were only about a dozen gigs with the original line-up, each smaller than the last, all making those stadium amps inappropriate. At an outdoor show in Mountain View, Arkansas, Rhea noticed that backstage, Bell's hands were shaking. The singer had been playing live since junior high, but this time he'd be performing his own songs and not covers, and the audience was not packed with friends. When they came back from a long weekend that Hummel dubbed their "BC tour" – a cargo van moving between small Southern towns named for ancient European cities: Corinth, Mississippi and Athens, Alabama – Bell first talked about giving up. There were no sales, no fans, and beyond the good press, not much evidence of success.

"Any time you put that much work and heart and soul into something and your expectations are so high…" muses Stephens, "well, Chris was rewarded by great reception from press, but not being able to realise a career, he set himself up for a fall from a higher place."

As a last effort, Ardent agreed to release and promote a second single: Bell's Don't Lie To Me on the A-side with Chilton's acoustic Watch The Sunrise on the back. But someone at Ardent screwed up and despite how the label read, the A-side played Thirteen, making it a double-sided Chilton single. Accidental though it may have been, Bell was left feeling ostracised by his band, his label and his studio. "Chris and Alex never had a falling out," says Jody Stephens. "Alex would be spotlighted in reviews and Chris didn't want to live under that shadow. I think that's why he left the band."

For Chilton, this giant flop of a masterpiece was just another helping of the shit sandwich he'd been served in The Box Tops. Meanwhile, he was gigging with another group in Memphis, had recently divorced, had a new girlfriend – a life that wasn't centred on Big Star. ➢

STAR TREK

There was life after #1 Record, in spite of everything. By John Mulvey.

CHRIS BELL
★★★★★
I Am The Cosmos
(Rykodisc, 1992)

Although a solo Bell 7-inch arrived in 1978, shortly before he died in a car crash, there was no official attempt to compile his post-Big Star sessions until 1992. *I Am The Cosmos*, amazingly, works as a coherent album: a baroque extrapolation of Bell's powerpop gifts, torn as they are between existential despair and religious rapture. What Gene Clark's *No Other* is to The Byrds, *I Am The Cosmos* is to Big Star.

BIG STAR
★★★★
Radio City *(Ardent 1974)*

"Chris's band" no more. With Bell departed, leaving behind a handful of uncredited co-writes, much of the quasi-innocence leaves the Big Star sound, too. Alex Chilton is far too capricious to be an orthodox band-leader, and Andy Hummel and Jody Stephens make key songwriting contributions. But while his aesthetic is clearly becoming more fraught, Chilton's still capable of romantic epiphanies alongside the sinewy R&B – notably the canonical jangle-pop of September Gurls.

BIG STAR
★★
In Space *(Rykodisc 2005)*

From 1993, Chilton periodically stepped away from his solo career to play with Stephens and Posies Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow as Big Star (*Columbia* captures their fun first show). Never a band to seize their moment, a studio set only followed 12 years later. Chilton lets the others do most of the work, fitfully engaging with surf-tinged tracks that seem an odd way to revive Big Star. Generally, you're probably better off with a Teenage Fanclub – or, indeed, a Posies – album.

BIG STAR
★★★★★
Third *(PVC, 1978)*

A document of a band very audibly disintegrating – both Chilton and Stephens suggested it shouldn't even have been called a Big Star album. This early iteration of an endlessly-disputed tracklisting surfaced four years late, with Chilton dismantling his old pop smarts and patching together flaky, lo-fi, often unnervingly beautiful songs from the fragments. A great album in spite of its maker's worst intentions – amid the wreckage, don't miss Stephens' oasis of sanity and sweetness, For You.

BIG STAR
★★★★
Complete Third
(Omnivore, 2016)

Much like the Beach Boys' *Smile*, *Third*'s unresolved sprawl is ideally suited to the comprehensive box set treatment, and in rounding up all extant demos and rough mixes over three CDs this tells a new story about Chilton's desolate masterpiece. Many folkish, surprisingly polished and well-adjusted demos suggest the subsequent studio takes might have been contrived to sound so wracked and unhinged. Chilton's duets with girlfriend Lesa Aldridge – a dopey take on I'm So Tired – are especially, poignantly cute.

➢ Handsome Andy Hummel, the writer of the album's most accessible tune, The India Song, was being courted by Ardent as a solo artist.

Stephens had a day job at the studio.

Bell had Big Star, and then he didn't.

Overwhelmed by disappointment, Bell turned to downers of any kind, alcohol, diversions and destruction. He lashed out at friends and cut at loved ones. One morning, he and Fry were alone in a studio and what transpired isn't known but Bell exited, kicked his boot through a wall-sized window, then headed out the back door, breaking a couple more panes. He was next seen on crutches. Another time, he broke a soda bottle at Ardent and in the parking lot he scratched "Pig" into the hood of Fry's black Mercedes. And there's the time he bulk-erased a reel of multitrack master tape from *#1 Record*. Big Star had become Chris Bell's big scar.

BIG STAR SPLIT UP BUT ARDENT RECORDS continued, developing other artists, and in May of 1973, asked Big Star to play at a convention of rock writers they were organising. Bell passed but the trio performed, loose and rocking to great reception. "We knew the writers would be rooting for us," says Stephens. "We could be underdogs. We didn't have anything we had to prove, we weren't even planning another record. It was just go and have a good time – and we did."

Chilton, Stephens and Hummel were coaxed back to Ardent for a second album. Similarly shimmering, it was looser but darker, more cynical than its predecessor but with the exact same luck. Coinciding with Stax's separation from Columbia Records, *Radio City* – September Gurls, Mod Lang and all – barely emerged from the warehouses to which it had shipped. Hummel split for an engineering degree and a career with General Dynamics working on fighter jets. Chilton and Stephens returned for torturous sessions on an even more hapless follow-up. Baring what soul the record business had not destroyed, the pair made an album so harrowing that it sat on a shelf for four years, rejected by all record companies; it was subsequently released, with various track listings, as *Third*, *Sister Lovers* and *Beale Street Green*.

"Those Big Star albums were a lot different than what people were doing at the time," John Fry told me. "That of course isn't always a good thing. The old saying is that you can always tell the pioneers because they're the guys with the arrows in their backs."

Chris Bell made occasional recordings, including a session with Beatles engineer Geoff Emerick, but he couldn't fight the family's pull and for a while wore a paper hat and managed one of the family's fast-food restaurants. "He took the same pride in managing that restaurant that he had in music," says Stephens. "It turns out, he took pride in doing a good job whatever he did."

Bell and Chilton would see each other occasionally, even added vocals to each other's recordings, but their tastes were further diverging. When Chilton was recording his punk-influenced, decidedly uncommercial *Like Flies On Sherbert* album, Bell stopped by to see if he wanted to go see recent hitmakers Horslips at Memphis's 12,000-seat arena. Chilton declined.

Not long after, in 1978, driving home from a rehearsal with Chilton collaborators Ken Woodley and Tommy Hoehn, Bell's Triumph Spitfire hit a telephone pole near his father's anchor restaurant and he was killed instantly. Some speculated suicide, but that road was infamous for its tyre-popping dips at the sewer grates. It's easy to imagine him changing a cassette and not watching the road as his wheel got caught. It was the death of an unknown star.

"CHRIS…" JOHN FRY SAID TO ME IN 1992, AND he paused as he reflected, "who knows where he'd be had he lived? For one thing, he had become a very committed Christian and nobody really says anything about that." Fry looked off, and as if his distant past swooshed closely by, he added: "Everybody involved in this thing, their life was not completely and totally screwed up for every minute of the day. But it was certainly in that kind of shape for enough of the time to cause some of this music."

Going on: post-Bell Big Star (from left) Stephens, Hummel, Chilton, 1973; (inset) the reunion era line-up (from left) Jon Auer, Chilton, Stephens, Ken Stringfellow, New York, November 8, 1995; (below) Chris Bell, fading star.

Courtesy David Bell/Omnivore Recordings, AF Archive/Alamy Stock Photo/Nothng Can Hurt Me (2012), Getty

Over the course of three Big Star albums, there's more Alex Chilton than Chris Bell. But the first album is defined by Bell, as was the group's inception. "Everybody is always saying Alex this and Alex that," Fry told me, "but Chris had an awful lot to do with that Big Star sound, more than really I realised. Until somebody gets taken out of a situation, you don't hear that."

Big Star began shining brighter in the 1980s and the glow fell on Bell, too. Cassettes were passed among hipsters, influencing R.E.M., The Replacements, arguably the whole alternative rock genre. In the UK, they imformed 4AD label boss Ivo Watts-Russell's This Mortal Coil project – which revived *Third* tracks Kanga Roo and Holocaust – and the '90s indie guitar wave, including Big Star's great boosters Teenage Fanclub. The band's failure and the music's persistence meant their discovery could feel personal. Knowledge of them was like a secret knock at a hidden speakeasy full of like minds.

CD reissues ensued and Chilton – who'd established an eccentric and iconoclastic solo career – was drawn into a revived Big Star with Stephens and two members of the Posies, Ken Stringfellow and Jon Auer. Bell's various tracks were compiled as a solo album, have been released in expanded form, and he's been covered by Beck and many others. The revived Big Star played big festivals and late-night TV, and even recorded an album, *In Space*. In 2010, Chilton and Stephens were set to reunite on-stage with Andy Hummel at the SXSW Music Conference, the first time in nearly 40 years. Days before the gig, Chilton died unexpectedly and four months later, Hummel was dead too, from cancer.

"CHRISTOPHER WAS GETTING WHACKED OUT. WE ALL WERE. WE'RE ALL DRINKING, TAKING DOWNS, PUKE ON THE FLOOR."
RICHARD ROSEBROUGH

Today, Jody Stephens works at Ardent, performs in the duo Those Pretty Wrongs and leads occasional Big Star tributes. He and John Fry stayed close until Fry's sudden death in 2014.

Big Star was not in sync with its era, but that removal from time has made them perennially relevant. The pristine sound is always fresh, the sincerity contagious, the menace real. And the band's initial failure never ceases to inspire: Big Star proved that dedication to the muse results in music that will find its audience, even if the creators don't live to know it. Popularity be damned, Big Star is about seeking and making great art. Ⓜ

Robert Gordon is the author of It Came From Memphis and Memphis Rent Party. He produced the concert video Big Star Live in Memphis. Rich Tupica material is from his 2020 book, There Was A Light: The Cosmic History Of Chris Bell And The Rise Of Big Star.

MOJO PRESENTS

For a decade, Shabaka Hutchings' SONS OF KEMET have blazed a trail for British jazz, bringing carnival energy, Afrocentric attitude and, sometimes, more than one tuba. And as they assure DANNY ECCLESTON, they're not done evolving. "The area that Caribbean music can occupy is infinite!"

Photography by **TOM OLDHAM**

VISITORS TO NORTH LONDON'S LIVINGSTON STUDIOS IN THE AUTUMN OF 2019 could easily have stumbled across something quite odd: four grown jazz musicians lying on the floor of the live room, in the pitch dark, screaming and screaming. Jazz can be a lot of things, the open-minded observer might have mused, but... *this*?

"It was cathartic!" laughs Shabaka Hutchings, the saxophonist-leader of Sons Of Kemet and the director of this unusual scenario. "Before every track I got everyone to do these breathing exercises. Thirty really deep breaths and you keep the last one in. I really felt it put us in a space that was *together*."

For the final track on Sons Of Kemet's latest album, however, he had something more extreme in mind. As the intense cacophony played back in their headphones, the four men on the floor wailed, shrieked and ululated until they were spent.

"There's complete darkness," remembers Hutchings, "and we're really letting it out. You have cans on, and you can't hear anyone, not even your own voice, so you're uninhibited. You're giving out pure emotion."

"UNINHIBITED" IS A GOOD WORD FOR SONS OF KEMET. FREQUENTERS OF THEIR decade of live shows will have seen a development that's felt less about honing and more like re-wilding. The original quartet – the imposing Hutchings on tenor mainly, but sometimes clarinet; drummers Tom Skinner and Seb Rochford; Oren Marshall on tuba and 'Orenophone' (a kind of unwieldy, unwound Sousaphone) – were extraordinary enough: a meld of jazz, Caribbean and near eastern musics that rattled the cutlery of diners at London's sedate jazz clubs. Their evolution – first Marshall handed over to his tuba protégé Theon Cross; then Rochford left and Edward Wakili-Hick stepped in – has coincided with an upsurge in the physicality, generic promiscuity and (yes, let's say it) popularity of British jazz music.

Uninhibited certainly describes Hutchings' saxophone playing on *Black To The Future* – their fourth album since 2013 – specifically the final section of May The Circle Be Unbroken, where his blowing fractures into an angry storm of desperate cries and shouts. Quizzed on it by MOJO, Hutchings almost sounds like he's blushing.

"Er, yeah – that was a bit intense," he whispers. "I mean, you encounter those moments, where it feels like you're an outlet for a different spirit. Or a different personality. And when it happens, it's not worth going back to it and trying to think it through. You've almost got to pretend it didn't happen. Then the magic might come back again." ➢

Tom Oldham

Looking for apparitions: Sons Of Kemet (from left) Shabaka Hutchings, Tom Skinner, Theon Cross, Edward Wakili-Hick at the Total Refreshment Centre, Stoke Newington, London, March 23, 2021.

SOK skank down in Babylon: (from left) Hutchings, Wakili-Hick, Cross, Skinner.

"WHAT SHABAKA'S SHOWN IS DON'T BE AFRAID TO LOOK TO YOURSELF AND YOUR OWN ROOTS. IT DOESN'T *HAVE* TO BE AMERICAN JAZZ."

Tom Skinner

While Hutchings is keen to avoid the pitfalls of over-thinking, he remains one of the great ponderers of contemporary British music (don't get him started on 'Quantum Afrofuturism'). Born in London in 1984, Shabaka Akua Lumumba Kamau Hutchings was raised in Birmingham and Barbados by a single mother. Returning to the UK in his teens, he studied classical clarinet at the Guildhall School Of Music, while his sax education progressed in groups as diverse as Seb Rochford's Polar Bear, Mulatu Astatke and the Sun Ra Arkestra. His current status among peers in British improvisational music is unquestioned – front and centre in Sons Of Kemet, spacetronic trio The Comet Is Coming and with South African spiritual jazz tyros in Shabaka & The Ancestors, to name only his three highest-profile projects. "He is a leader," says Tom Skinner. "Listen to all the young tenor players – you can hear Shabaka in all of them. He has kicked in a door for this generation."

Yet in the mists of 2011, Hutchings' decision to begin his band-leading life in a two-drummers, sax and tuba combo seemed eccentric – quadruply so at the March 2013 show at Camden's Forge venue that peaked with four tubas on stage. What, literally, was he thinking?

"I recently found my old notebook from the year I formed Sons Of Kemet so I could actually look through the process," he says. "I was thinking of all kind of combinations. At one point I had [drummer] Mark Sanders, and I was thinking a guitarist, maybe David Okumu…"

Eventually, Hutchings settled on Marshall but was torn between Skinner and Rochford, until he thought, "Why not both? I was listening to this Tony Malaby album, *Apparitions*," he recalls. "He had two drummers on that and I loved the way they interacted, not with one taking the groove but each communicating with the other."

The Kemet sound, with two drummers shifting focus and the tuba swaggering about, has always felt mobile and purposeful. It turns out it's a legacy of Hutchings' earliest musical experiences: playing bass drum in a marching band.

"Tuk is the traditional music of Barbados," Hutchings explains. "You've got a bass drum, a snare drum, a triangle and a guy on a flute. Unlike the larger islands in the Caribbean – which were big enough to have hidden places where African religious rites could be observed – on Barbados, that cultural retention went under the radar. It slipped into their military marching music, into the syncopation of tuk."

HUTCHINGS TALKS A LOT ABOUT SONS OF KEMET as a vessel for the myriad musics of the African diaspora, and his example is infectious. Dreadlocked Wakili-Hick has adjusted his approach (and his name) to embrace more of his West African heritage. "I've been introducing kpanlogo," says the drummer in drowsy Yorkshire tones, "a Ghanaian drum. And an igba – a Nigerian talking drum. Bringing different sounds in." Cross is the group's bass music specialist, versed in grime (he's lent his tuba to Kano, Little Simz and Ruff Sqwad) but also steeped in 'blocos', the Brazilian-style carnival bands he played in from ages 12 to 17. "I suppose I bring that carnival energy to Sons Of Kemet, where the audience is part of the band," he reflects. "It's like an acoustic sound system."

What it isn't is conformity to 'classic' jazz templates, insists Tom Skinner. "What Shabaka's shown is don't be afraid to look to yourself and your own roots and experience and use that as the basis for a sound," says the drummer. "It doesn't *have* to be American jazz."

Bringing his roots and experience to the stage and the studio has, for Hutchings, meant foregrounding the history of African people. On SOK's 2018 album, *Your Queen Is A Reptile*, the tracks were named for an alternative pantheon of 'queens': pioneering black women including Angela Davis and Harriet Tubman. And although its core grooves were laid down in advance of George Floyd's killing

Tom Oldham, Richard Gray/EMPICS Entertainment/PA, Getty

Sons Of Kemet get tuk in on-stage at the 2019 Latitude Festival, Suffolk; (below) Hutchings with Kamasi Washington, Ghent Jazz Festival, July 2017; (left, from top) young Shabaka's first professional gig in 1995, aged 11; early SOK line-up (from left) Skinner, Oren Marshall, Seb Rochford, Hutchings, 2013.

RISING SONS

The fruits of Kemet, so far, by **Danny Eccleston**.

on March 25, 2020, *Black To The Future* opens with a poem written by Joshua Idehen in its immediate aftermath. Railing at the structures that would constrain or define black people, it aims a barb at the UK's former equality tsar, Trevor Phillips. "I hope I never bump into him actually!" laughs Hutchings, before delicately addressing the problematic position of "anyone who's used in ways that can be considered tokenistic".

The saxophonist is more bluntly critical of responses to Black Lives Matter that he describes as "taking up space". "If your response to this traumatic event is, you know, thinking about it for half an afternoon and then spewing out what you think about it on social media," he says, "this isn't necessarily the kind of soul searching that's going to remedy the problem."

The new album's last track, Black, is also voiced by Joshua Idehen. Its last words, "Leave us alone", are uncompromising. What do they mean to Hutchings?

"I take it to mean 'leave black culture alone', or leave African cultural knowledge to develop on its own terms, without the gaze or interpretation of external forces," he says. "Leave black people to develop without the fear of being harassed or being depicted. It's about our freedom to be multiple."

DEFINITION BY EXTERNAL forces was barely an issue for British jazz musicians before their recent exposure to the spotlight, but Hutchings and co are already working on confounding expectations. In November 2020 the BBC revived its venerable Jazz 625 strand for a TV special on UK jazz acts including Nubya Garcia, Moses Boyd and Ezra Collective. Rather than strapping on the tenor and blowing viewers' heads off, Hutchings applied his clarinet to a mournful revision of *Black To The Future*'s In Remembrance Of Those Fallen.

"It wasn't a statement, as such," says Hutchings. "But you know, we're never going to satisfy anyone's idea of what we're supposed to be. We are whatever we are at that particular moment. The pandemic, for me, felt like a moment for reflection. And as I get older I realise that everything doesn't have to be shouting in your face." He laughs. "Sometimes you can just *tell* someone your opinion."

A scream to a whisper? Hutchings says he can visualise the next stage of Sons Of Kemet's evolution – exploring lower volumes, more dynamics, but rawer sax sounds. Meanwhile, he has been listening to lots of soca and calypso, a way of battling what he calls American music's "hegemonic allure".

"The area that Caribbean music can occupy is infinite," he says. "It's exciting because it means that no one can predict what the future of music is gonna be. People will always say, 'Oh the music scene is dying…' For me that's the worst type of outlook, and it makes no sense…"

He pauses. A little steel enters the lilt of his voice. "It's like, are you even *listening*?"

BURN

★★★★

(Naim, 2013)

Sons Of Kemet's first phase, with Seb Rochford on half the drums and Oren Marshall on tuba and Orenophone, showcased what Hutchings calls "a more exploratory, jazz-based group". Yet the tenorist's urgency and Marshall's reggaefied low-end blurts marked them out from the very start. A criticism? Too much reverb.

LEST WE FORGET WHAT WE CAME HERE TO DO

★★★★

(Naim, 2015)

Theon Cross's arrival made SOK "more full-frontal, more of a *band*," says Hutchings. Crashing into the opening In Memory Of Samir Awad about two-thirds in, the tubist certainly seems to pull everything together. Meanwhile, the nine-minute Afrofuturism is the closest they've come, says Hutchings, to Barbadian 'tuk'.

YOUR QUEEN IS A REPTILE

★★★★

(Impulse!, 2018)

Everything feels more pointed on SOK's third, where Anglo-Nigerian poet Joshua Idehen brings the politics and Tom Skinner, paired with a transitional cast of drum partners, earns his corn. My Queen Is Harriet Tubman made the soundtrack of Beyoncé's 2019 Homecoming doc, much to the delight of Theon Cross.

BLACK TO THE FUTURE

★★★★

(Impulse!, 2021)

More budget meant more studio time to brew more intense grooves, over which Hutchings' layered woodwinds evoke a forest of birds. Depth and richness ensue, but also SOK's most powerful statements, with guest vocalists and Hutchings' sax idols Steve Williamson and Kebbi Williams stoking the fire.

On the lookout for "deeper, more eccentric stuff": The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach (right) and Patrick Carney take a break from the studio; (right) the mighty Howlin' Wolf on stage, Big John's, Chicago, January 19, 1966.

PREACHIN' the BLUES

THE BLACK KEYS' *Delta Kream* drags them back to their grimy roots as garage blues evangelists. A good time to ask DAN AUERBACH & PATRICK CARNEY to talk MOJO through their ultimate blues heroes and the mind-boggling music they made. "It's so raw and real," they tell ANDREW PERRY. Portrait by ALYSSE GAFKJEN.

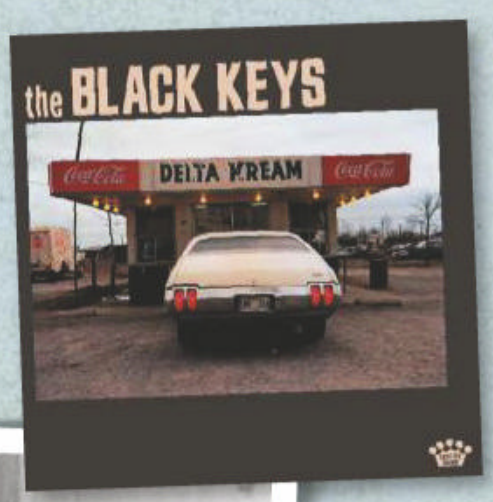
A KNACKERED OLD BANJO AND A cheese-grater percussion instrument sit in a quiet corner of Dan Auerbach's Easy Eye Sound studio. In the past decade, a procession of artists – including top-flighters Lana Del Rey, CeeLo Green and Dr. John – have gravitated to this downbeat facility in Nashville for a zingy, retro-analog production style, neatly encapsulated in the house motto, "Good Sound Comes Back Around!"

"It's just who I am," says Auerbach, gulping down his 10am coffee through a trim auburn beard, while visibly marvelling at the thought of diversity. "I'll do soul records, rock'n'roll bands, old people, young people – genreless! (*triumphantly*) Haha – genre *lost!*"

With his own flagship band The Black Keys, however, Auerbach has just cut a record of relative generic purity. *Delta Kream* returns the duo to their roots in the Mississippi blues, music Auerbach and drummer Patrick Carney first mined a quarter of a century ago in Akron, Ohio, cutting their teeth on tunes by then-septuagenarian hill country bluesmen such as R.L. Burnside, T-Model Ford and Junior Kimbrough.

"Dan and me grew up five or six doors down from each other," recalls Carney from his own Nashville studio, Audio Eagle, "but we never hung out except for trading baseball cards. We thought we had nothing in common. He was a long-haired, pot-smoking soccer player, and I was a speccy Devo fan, but in late high school we found out we were both into R.L. Burnside."

For indie-nerd Carney, the epiphany came when Burnside collaborated with Jon Spencer Blues Explosion on 1996's *A Ass Pocket Of Whiskey*, while teenage Auerbach had been hipped to early blues by his antique-dealer father and bluegrass-playing uncles, then "came upon this deeper, more eccentric contemporary stuff".



Early in their existence, The Black Keys mainlined the North Mississippi artists, recording seven Kimbrough tunes on their 2006 mini-album *Chulahoma*. They've since been to the top of the world and back, exploring less genre-specific rootsiness on 2010's breakthrough *Brothers* LP, and storming the pop charts with the following year's *El Camino*.

With fame came divorces and tension between the two, to the extent that 2019's first outing in five years, *Let's Rock*, says Carney, was "just about having fun and being friends". Its follow-up, *Delta Kream*, "was a real no-brainer record," continues the drummer, "but we didn't have the brain to think of it until it kind of fell in our lap."

In December 2019, Easy Eye sessions for a second Auerbach production on veteran soulman Robert Finley wound up early, leaving two of its sidemen – world-beating slide-guitarist Kenny Brown, now 67, who was R.L. Burnside's six-string foil for 35 years, and Junior Kim- ➢

Alysse Gafkjen, Bridgeman Images

brough's bassist, Eric Deaton – at a loose end for the rest of the week. Auerbach called in Carney to join them on the Thursday and Friday, and it was "a very different experience," says Auerbach, from the artfully drilled *Let's Rock*. "It was just, be in the moment, and do it."

For all four players, rattling through oldies either written or adapted by Burnside and Kimbrough was second nature – they'd nailed 11 of them by the Friday lunchtime.

"North Mississippi blues is very different from Delta blues," notes Auerbach. "The hill country is a little closer to Memphis, so it's more electric, and all about the rhythm. Most of the songs are only one chord, so it's really minimal, and hypnotic."

"Playing this stuff, especially Kimbrough," adds Carney, "you can't fuck it up – it's *already* fucked up. If you start thinking about it, you've lost it. Kenny's playing is just this nuanced self-taught insanity, and that's always what Dan and I have been attracted to."

Welcome then, to The Black Keys' Blues Hall Of Fame – where nuanced self-taught insanity will always find a home…

SON HOUSE (1902-1988)

Né Edward James House Jr, the Delta wingman of Charley Patton, and author of the much-covered John The Revelator.

Auerbach: "I guess Robert Johnson became the absolute star of Delta blues, but Son House was like the Godfather. He had this hard Delta style, with the flat steel guitar. He was the boss.

"I heard him a lot growing up. My dad had that 2-CD release of his Columbia recordings from 1965, after he was rediscovered, which had stuff like Grinning In Your Face, done *a cappella*.

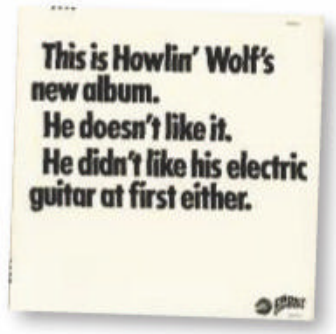
"I heard this kind of music in all different forms – my dad's blues records, and the bluegrass that my uncles would play – and I heard the same lines in a Son House song as I did in a Stanley Brothers song. There is always that beautiful stew happening.

"I obviously backtracked to hear House's early recordings [from 1930, and 1941-2], but on those his voice almost sounds a little Mickey Mouse to me. I just prefer those later recordings, when he was older.

"After he was rediscovered, Son was apparently a good performer, just depending on how drunk he'd get. You can hear that on those Columbia recordings, and they talk about it in the linernotes – it was a crap shoot what you were going to get, depending on how shit-hammered he was! But that is also part of how the songs sound too. Some of them kind of roll like a lopsided tyre."

HOWLIN' WOLF (1910-1976)

White Station, Mississippi behemoth who migrated north to dominate Chicago electric blues.



Carney: "I came into this type of music through the hated bastardised versions – the weird psychedelic blues records that Wolf and Muddy Waters made in the late '60s. My dad's best friend, Robert, would send me tapes when I was a kid, and one had Junior Parker on one side, and [Waters'] *Electric Mud* on the other. I only listened to the *Electric Mud* side. I wore it out, and soon became obsessed with *The Howlin' Wolf Album* [whose artwork TBK homaged on *Brothers*].

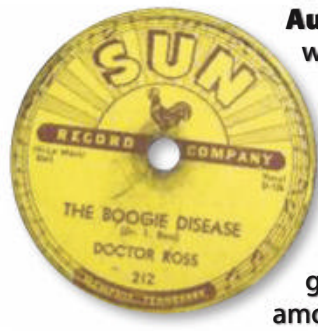
"Honestly, the distorted guitar plays a huge role in me liking it, and the repetitiveness, but the drumming on that shit is crazy, the bass-playing is insane, and it felt really heavy to me, like listening to Sabbath. It just knocks hard, and fucking grooves.

"I soon went back to all the early Chess stuff, and watched footage where he seems almost possessed – and he was a big guy, like 300lbs, pretty scary. But I heard Howlin' Wolf *after* I heard Captain Beefheart, and that late-'60s album remains one of my favourite records – particularly the versions of Smokestack Lightning, Spoonful and the beginning of Little Red Rooster.

"I always thought the language on that record cover was so fuckin' sassy, dude. 'This is Howlin' Wolf's new album. He doesn't like it.' Oh my God! '*We* know better than Howlin' Wolf!' Like, what are you *doing*?"

DOCTOR ROSS (1925-1993)

Charles Isaiah Ross, the self-appointed 'Harmonica Boss' – a solo operator from Tunica, Mississippi.



Auerbach: "I don't know why it is, but I've always loved one-man bands – that raw, stripped-down sound. It's like, all you need to keep it rockin'.

"Probably you've got to have the right amount of screw loose to want to do it. The way this other one-man-band guy, Hasil Adkins, tells it, he'd hear Hank Williams on the radio, and the announcer saying, 'That was Hank Williams!' and he thought that meant it was Hank playing all the instruments – so he took them literally and started his own one-man band.

"Doctor Ross lived in Michigan in later life, but my favourite recordings by him are the ones he made down South, for Sam Phillips at Sun. They're wicked cool, and hard to beat – on the same level as Howlin' Wolf's.

"The Boogie Disease and Shake A My Hand are amazing tracks, and he did a great version of Shake 'Em On Down, which I saw R.L. Burnside play a million times. He also did Cat Squirrel [in 1961], which Cream covered. He's got a song about going to war called Little Soldier Boy, and another one, Country Clown, about being insecure that he's from the country.

"There are other one-man-bands like Abner Jay, and Joe Hill Louis, but Doctor Ross really was the boss – a whole other level of boss!"

MISSISSIPPI FRED McDOWELL (1906-1972)

Rowdy hill-country bottleneck-guitar maestro, and author of The Rolling Stones' take on You Gotta Move.

Auerbach: "Before I got into Fat Possum, my dad had Skip James and Son House, but then my uncle gave me a couple of records on Arhoolie, really good recordings by Lil' Son Jackson and Lightnin' Hopkins. So, I started getting all of the stuff I could on that label, including one by Mississippi Fred McDowell called *Delta Blues*, which is where I first heard a lot of the hill country songs, before R.L. Burnside even appeared on my radar. Then all of a sudden I saw R.L. actually *playing* these songs, and it was in the flesh. It blew my mind, and really made me want to play music.

"My favourite Fred McDowell recordings are those Arhoolie ones from 1964, rather than the earlier Alan Lomax ones from '59. Write Me A Few Lines, off that record, is one of my favourite hill country songs. I love the way that it starts slow, and speeds up gradually, and builds in intensity – just beautiful. His slide playing is so inspirational, so rhythmic, it's like he has a one-man band in his hands.

Carney: "I didn't know about Mississippi Fred until Dan and I became tight. Dan has his last electric guitar, which we actually used on *Delta Kream*."

Preparing to whip up some of that *Delta Kream*: "Just be in the moment, and do it" – (from left) Carney, bassist Eric Deaton, guitarist Kenny Brown and Auerbach get themselves ready for "a very different experience".

Joshua Black Wilkins, Don Paulsen/Getty, Herve Gloaguen/Gamma-Rapho/Getty, Getty, Alamy

"He seems possessed, a big guy, 300 lbs": Howlin' Wolf contemplates his new album; Son House (left), on-stage at London's Hammersmith Odeon, 1967; Mississippi Fred McDowell (bottom) in 1960, "a one-man band in his hands"; Doctor Ross, the Harmonica Boss (centre left).

Credit Unknown

"IT WAS A CRAP SHOOT WHAT YOU WERE GOING TO GET WITH SON HOUSE, DEPENDING ON HOW SHIT-HAMMERED HE WAS!"

DAN AUERBACH

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART (1941-2010)

The Mojave Desert's answer to Howlin' Wolf, with lashings of surrealist poetry.

Carney: "In 1998-99, I was 18, just graduating high school, and one of my jobs was delivering pizzas. I would work from five until nine, and for four months straight I'd drive around listening to *Safe As Milk*. Like, why does this record make me feel so obsessive? Then I got deeper into the catalogue.

"I think *Trout Mask Replica* has one of the best record covers ever, but I never put it on for enjoyment. I've always been more a *Spotlight Kid* type of guy. I found that one at a used record store in Akron for a buck, and the minute I heard it, I felt like I'd heard it before, because it reminded me so much of Tom Waits' *Rain Dogs* [on which his uncle, Ralph Carney, played sax]. I was like, 'Aaah, it's a puzzle and it's all falling into place.'

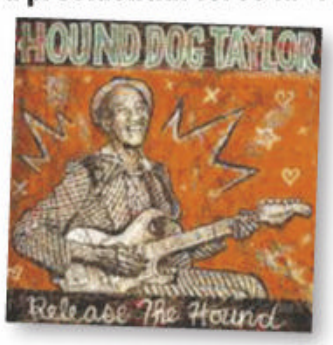
"I also love the *Mirror Man Sessions*. Dan and I used to listen to that all day long, and if you listen to those, you can see a definitive line through to Junior Kimbrough, that kind of droney, repetitive blues dirge.

"Is Beefheart 'authentic'? In my mind, there's Chicago blues that *doesn't* feel authentic, more like a technical exercise. Beefheart grew up in the desert listening to rock'n'roll records on late-night radio channels. To me, he is just an American eccentric, which is what any great blues artist is.

"I cannot overstate the importance of Beefheart, to the point where I actually own two of Don Van Vliet's paintings."

HOUND DOG TAYLOR (1915-1975)

Mississippi-born Theodore Roosevelt Taylor, a presidential force in '70s Chicago blues.



Auerbach: "The ultimate blues fruitcake, perfectly spiced, was Hound Dog Taylor. Every time he played a show it was like a holiday. When I was young, I spent months trying to track down this VHS cassette of him playing at the Ann Arbor blues festival – five songs of the most ate-up 8mm footage!

"His Houserockers band was a hardcore three-piece, no bass, just two guitars and drums, and they were locked *in*, in the way that R.L. Burnside's band were. Very similar. Rolling Stone called them the 'Ramones of the blues', because they were so fast-paced, frantic, just boom-boom-boom-boom, everything turned up to fucking 11.

"He had an extra finger on his left hand, and on-stage, he would sit down on a folding chair and play slide guitar. He would smile from ear to ear, showing a bunch of gold teeth, wearing a big-collared suit, and he could make everyone in the place smile back – he had that much charisma.

"He had been around in the '60s. When Little Walter went over to Europe in '67, Hound Dog went with him, but he never got famous. He was unrecorded, just playing bars in Chicago, then Bruce Iglauer put out these two amazing early-'70s records on Alligator, and everybody loved him. He started playing colleges, but as soon as he got popular, he got sick and passed away. Pretty tragic, but he got a victory lap for sure, and rightfully so."

JESSIE MAE HEMPHILL (1923-2006)

From Como, Mississippi, the grand-daughter of string-bandleader Sid Hemphill, and self-styled 'Queen Of The Guitar Boogie'.

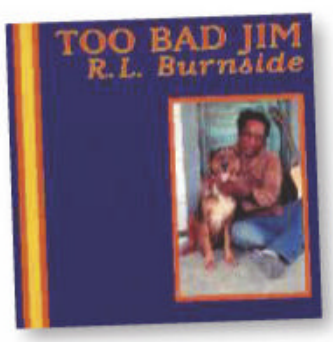
Auerbach: "Jessie had the black cowgirl look, always wearing a cowgirl hat, with cowgirl braids in her hair, and she had the most amazing Southern drawl. I've seen plenty of pictures with her holding a gun, too. She always had the little pistol on her, so I've heard from both Eric Deaton and Kenny Brown off our record, who played with her a bunch. They both say she was totally the real deal.

"In her prime in the '70s, she'd just play locally, and at family gatherings, and the recordings made by [ethnomusicologist] David Evans in '73 didn't come out 'til later, so I don't know if it ever really happened for her. I didn't get to see her play, but that David Evans record is definitely in my top three hill country records of all time.

"She wrote great songs, like Standing In My Doorway Crying, and Go Back To Your Used To Be. She was heavy on the hill country style, that one-chord rhythmic thing, but she laid back on it pretty hard, back in the pocket. She played open tunings, and she would tap on the tambourine – not a one-man band, but old church style. She had this guy, R.L. Boyce, playing the drums, very eccentric, like Captain Beefheart drumming."

R.L. BURNSIDE (1926-2005)

Mississippi hill country hell-raiser, who scored twilight credibility after joining Fat Possum in 1991.



Auerbach: "How I came across R.L. was, he was headlining rock'n'roll clubs, touring with Kenny Brown on guitar, and his grandson Cedric on drums. I saw him in Cleveland, with T-Model Ford opening. He came through a few times, and that's what got me interested in going down to Mississippi – like, 'Oh my God, this is real, I can actually see this stuff in person.' They got everybody in the room moving. R.L. had a backbeat with his thumb like nobody else – like, wacka-wacka. With him and Kenny together, it was just so much forward momentum.

"I'd hang out for hours after shows with him. R.L. would hold court. He was the king, so charismatic, so funny, the life of the party. He told stories and jokes the whole time. He was just having a great time, late in life.

"There was definitely something hard-edged and rock'n'roll about what he was doing – just so grinding and gritty, so raw and real, in the same way that The Stooges' *Fun House* is raw and real.

"My favourite record is *Too Bad Jim* [1994], and the David Evans solo recordings [1979]. Songs like Poor Boy A Long Way From Home, he'd play live every time I saw him, but there's less rockin' stuff he *wouldn't* play, like Mellow Peaches. I love that song so much. I was in a dream state doing it with Kenny on the new record. I had no idea what I was doing."

T-MODEL FORD (1923-2013)

Wildcard arriviste from Greenville, MS, who famously received his first guitar aged 57 from his fifth wife, but only started playing it a year later after she left him.

Auerbach: "With all of these North Mississippi guys, they were such strong personalities. They had a lot of the same repertoire, and it's the personality that changes the song. T-Model was a total character, and Pat and I really bonded over that first Fat Possum record, *Pee-Wee Get My Gun* [1997].

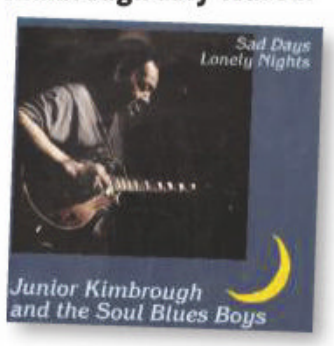
"The first time I went down to Mississippi with my dad, we met T-Model, and he invited us into his place. He lived in a double-wide trailer, so it was raised up a little, and he had a hole in the floor that he could crawl out of, in case one of his exes turned up.

"Later on, I spent a couple of nights there. He'd had a hard life. His dad beat him so hard, he lost a testicle – overnight, he was crawled up underneath a bush, just beaten up and bloody. He walked with a cane, because one day he was sitting in his front yard, and a branch from a tree fell on him.

"But I think that's why he enjoyed himself so much. I mean, he had a real temper. You could tell he didn't fuck around. He had hands of steel that would grab you and hold onto you hard, just to let you know – 'Even though I use this cane, I can still fuck you! I'm still the man!' But I never saw him not smiling."

JUNIOR KIMBROUGH (1930-1998)

Scantly recorded 'til the '90s, Junior's juke joint in Chulahoma, Mississippi drew blues lovers including Iggy Pop, with whom Kimbrough duly toured.



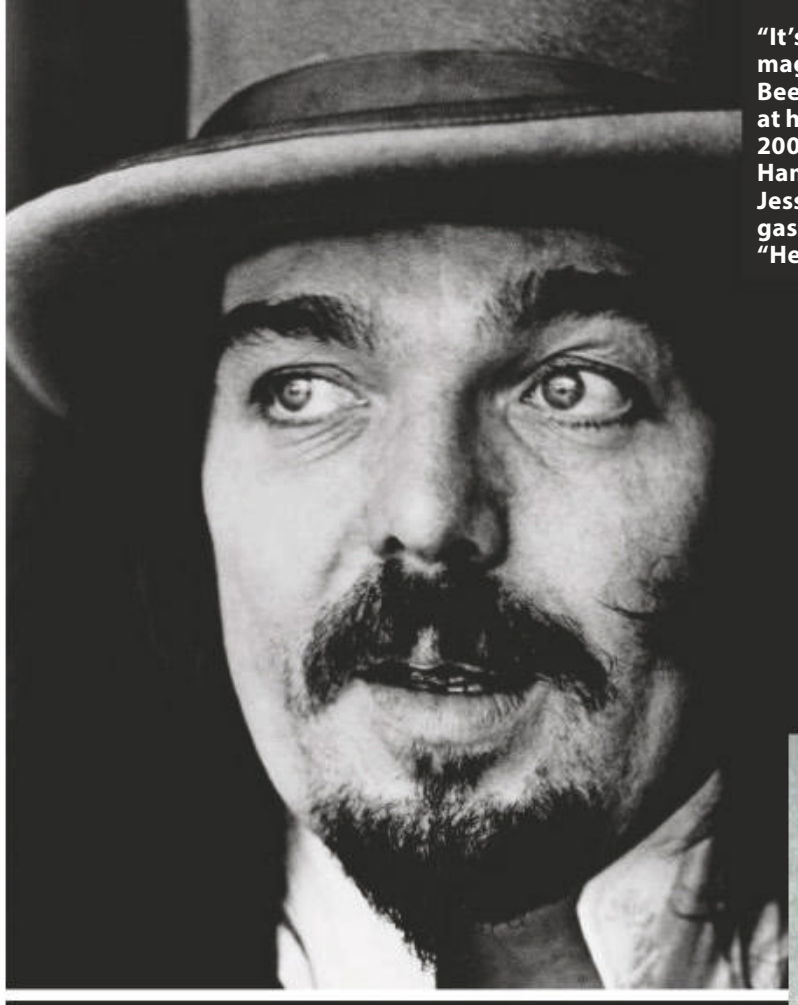
Auerbach: "I never got to see Junior. I went to his juke joint a few times before I realised he was sick, and then he passed away. So, to begin with, I got into *Too Bad Jim*, and *Pee-Wee Get My Gun*, because they're so direct and visceral, but eventually it clicked with Junior, and he just blew my mind. *Sad Days, Lonely Nights* [1994] is one of my favourite records of all time. It's a bunch of long, slithering songs, and Kenny, the guy on our new record, is all over it.

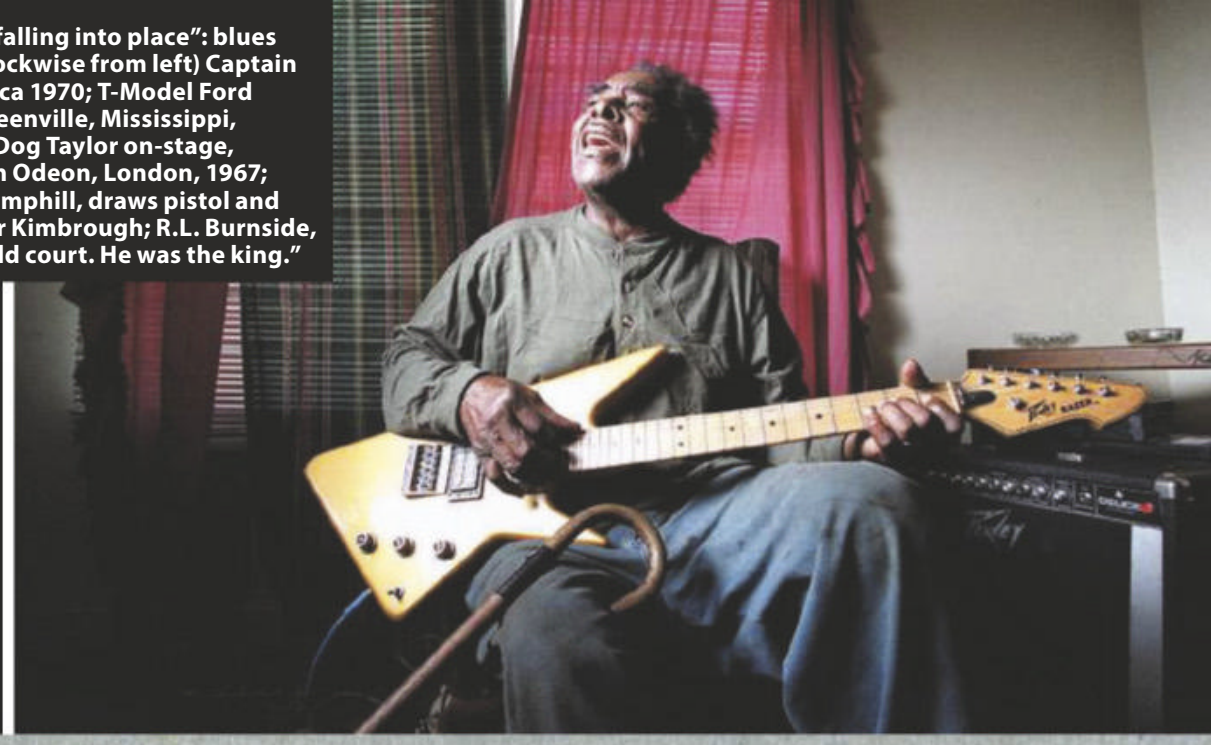
"R.L.'s songs are simple, driving and repetitive, but every time Junior played a song it would be different – and he would play it for 20 minutes! He was pretty out there, a whole other different style, kind of like Ali Farka Touré with a backbeat.

"That makes his stuff great for driving – like you're rolling with the hills. Eric [Deaton, bassist] says it was instinctual playing at Junior's. You'd start stretching out that groove, and you could feel it when the crowd had all locked in. It took six, seven, eight minutes, and then all of a sudden you could feel the room start to vibrate.

"That instinctual rhythm, straight, simple, without deviating – Pat and I always loved music like that, whether it was Junior or The Stooges. We didn't listen to virtuosos, we'd rather hear four people play the same thing over and over. The right people doing that the right way is heaven to us." Ⓜ

Getty (3), New York Times/Redux/Eyevine, ©Rambling Steve Gardner

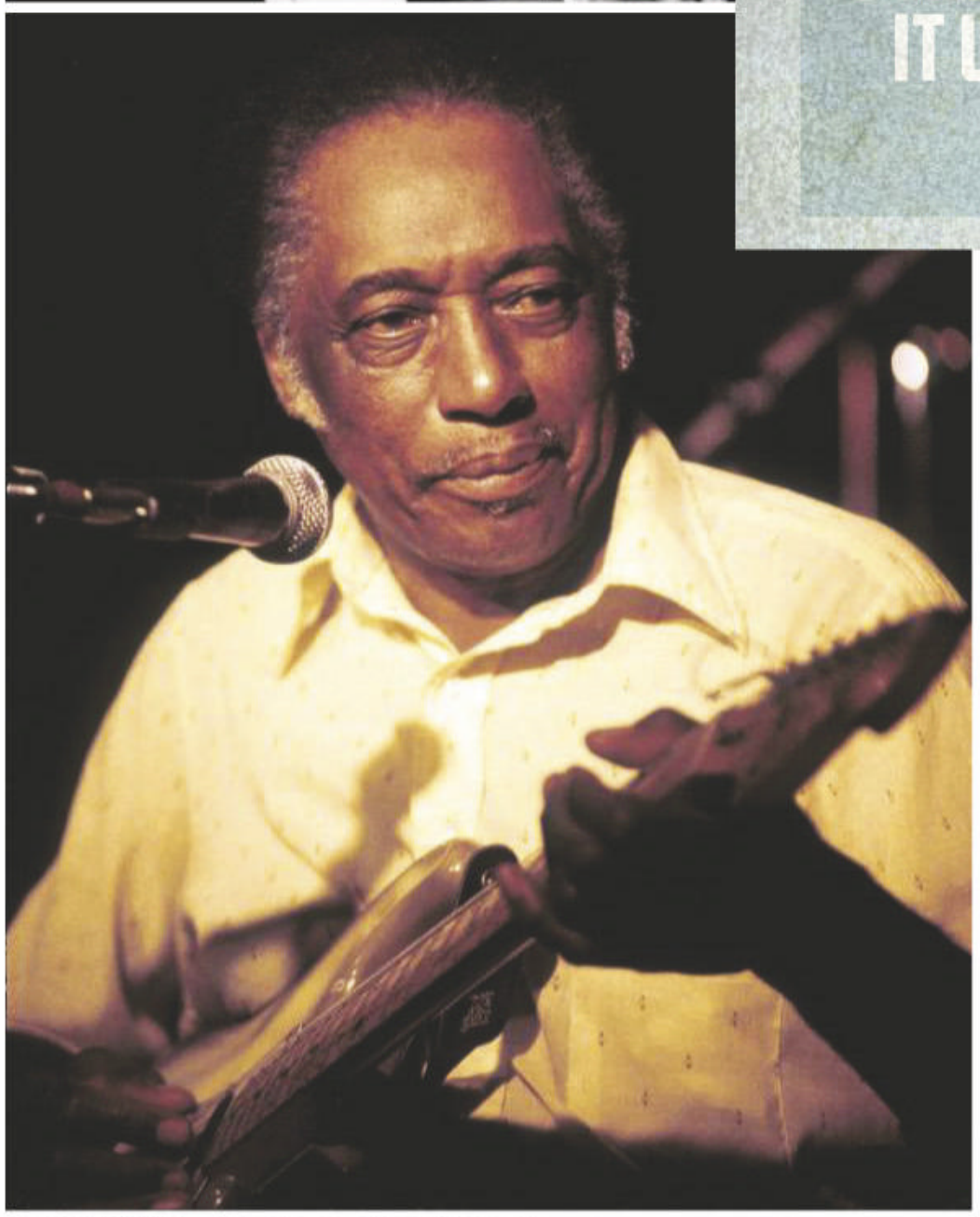




"It's a puzzle falling into place": blues magicians (clockwise from left) Captain Beefheart, circa 1970; T-Model Ford at home in Greenville, Mississippi, 2001; Hound Dog Taylor on-stage, Hammersmith Odeon, London, 1967; Jessie Mae Hemphill, draws pistol and gasper; Junior Kimbrough; R.L. Burnside, "He would hold court. He was the king."

"PLAYING THIS STUFF, ESPECIALLY JUNIOR KIMBROUGH, YOU CAN'T FUCK IT UP – IT'S *ALREADY* FUCKED UP."

PATRICK CARNEY



Credit in Print

50 YEARS OF **BLUE**

LOVE STORIES

FROM SASKATOON TO LAUREL CANYON, FROM CRETE TO CHAPEL HILL AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT, THE PLEASURES AND PAINS OF ROMANCE PURSUED JONI MITCHELL. AND 50 YEARS AGO, SHE ETCHED THEM INTO *BLUE* – A MASTERPIECE OF POETRY AND MELODY, POWER AND VULNERABILITY, THAT ASTONISHED HER PEERS, THEN AND NOW. "IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS I'D EVER HEARD," HEARS GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN.

PORTRAIT BY TIM CONSIDINE.

IT WAS THE FOURTH DAY OF THE THIRD ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL, SATURDAY, August 29, 1970. The afternoon's line-up suggested some staggering variety show: Tiny Tim and John Sebastian, The Doors and The Who, Miles Davis with some of the crew that had just made *Bitches Brew,* and Joni Mitchell, set for the 9pm slot.

Local residents had protested the expected influx of loud ne'er-do-wells, especially after the success of the first two festivals and the chaos of Woodstock and Altamont the year before. Organisers scrambled, moving the five-day affair for the first time to a farm at the base of Afton Downs, a hilly expanse of grass-speckled chalk that offered a prime perch for thousands of attendees who believed all music should be free. As the crowd swelled beyond half a million, those who still wanted in began to crash the formidable metal fence. Promoters debated asking the world's biggest bands to play for free, to appease the growing mob.

"The kids got upset about the commercialisation that was going on. When you get a crowd of that many people, and one guy starts, 'Let's get in for nothing,' there's a ripple effect," the film-maker Murray Lerner told Louder nearly half a century later. "That whole movement began to break apart."

The idealism of the just-expired '60s was fracturing, in part, because of the conspicuous wealth of its stars: Mitchell, for instance, arrived in a rented red Rolls-Royce, with Neil Young and their manager Elliot Roberts. Donovan came with a lavish antique stagecoach, complete with ostentatious bevelled windows; it became Mitchell's dressing room.

"It was the hate-the-performer festival," Mitchell remembered in the 2018 documentary Both Sides Now. Four months earlier, she had released *Ladies Of The Canyon*, her third album, and was steadily becoming a star of the singer-songwriter scene. "There was an expression of wealth taking place."

But at mid-afternoon, the sun still high in the sky, organisers implored Mitchell to take one for the flagging team. After a slew of cancellations, they needed her to perform in broad daylight, as gates crashed and police clashed with the kids on Desolation Row, an illicit campsite built of straw. Mitchell resisted, then conceded. "I have a feminine cooperative streak," she lamented. ➢

Tim Considine Productions (author@yanksatlemans.com)

Artist at work: Joni Mitchell making a Valentine for 'Willy' AKA Graham Nash, Los Angeles, January 1969.

"You're acting like tourists, man. Give us some respect": Joni Mitchell winning over the crowd, Isle Of Wight Festival, August 29, 1970; (centre right shots) interloper Yogi Joe is removed; the shirtless hordes remake Ben-Hur.

Rolls press/Popperfoto/Getty, Getty (3), Retna/Avalon, Alamy

◀ Wearing a long mustard-flower dress and an assortment of turquoise and silver, she strode on-stage with only a Martin guitar for a crowd composed mostly, it seemed, of shirtless men. Standing in front of The Who's Stonehenge of colossal amps, she adjusted the microphone and her capo and, in an attempt to break the ice, joked, "Looks like they're making Ben-Hur or something." She laughed nervously and alone, like a comedian flopping at the start of their stand-up debut.

The set didn't get better: she sang her first few songs to a tide of apathetic chatter and above distracting ripples of feedback. She politely reproached the crowd's noise: "It really puts me uptight, and then I get nervous and forget the words. Just give me a little help, will you?" Then, just as she summoned Woodstock, a man in the throes of a bad trip had to be lifted from the first few rows. A parental panic washed over Mitchell's face. But she returned to the piano for Woodstock, encouraging the crowd to join her in the chorus, in getting "back to the garden".

The moment she finished, Yogi Joe – months earlier, the man who gave Mitchell her first yoga lesson, and had now inexplicably found his way onto the stage with some hand drums – grabbed the microphone and began lecturing the crowd about rock music's crass commercialism. Roberts and a dragoon of security guards tried to ply him off stage, Mitchell eventually pleading with him. The crowd went berserk, drowning out her piano as she began My Old Man, an unreleased song about being in love with Graham Nash. Finally, she had enough.

"Listen a minute, will ya? Will ya listen a minute? Now listen," she yelled, spinning toward the crowd while fending off tears. "I get my feelings off through my music. But, listen: you got your life wrapped up in it, and it's very difficult to come out here and lay something down when… you're acting like tourists, man. Give us some respect."

It worked. Mitchell's final six songs were a *tour de force* of bare feelings, unrecorded songs A Case Of You and California holding as much power and sway as the established favourites Both Sides Now and Big Yellow Taxi. For California, written about her return to The Golden State after gallivanting through Europe with hippies and rich-kid rubberneckers, she even sat down on a folding chair with a four-string Appalachian dulcimer, a relatively exotic instrument she'd been playing for a year. "Can you give me a little more volume on the dulcimer – somehow?" she said, beaming and at ease.

"I've run for much less than that," Mitchell would remember. "But I thought, I have to stand up… And the beast lay down. The beast lay down."

It was a galvanising moment for Mitchell, an instant in which she realised the power that her seemingly small sound – her voice and a few strings, a grand piano at most – could have. That vulnerability had been a touchstone of her first three albums but, in the months to come, she pushed it to the centre of the 10 songs she cut at the beginning of 1971. In the record she would title *Blue*, she sang candidly of love's joys and follies, of the ways it had crushed and uplifted her. She sang of regret for leaving, of discomfort with staying. She sang, for the first time, of the child she'd put up for adoption six years earlier. Half a century later, *Blue* remains one of the most complete encapsulations of how it feels to be young and falling in or out of love.

"I was a plastic bag with all my organs exposed, sobbing on an auditorium chair," Mitchell once said. "That's how I felt. Like my guts were on the outside. I wrote *Blue* in that condition."

IN THE SPRING OF 1968, TIM CONSIDINE WAS A former child star approaching 30. The scion of a prominent showbusiness family, Considine appeared in a smattering of films before making a star turn in My Three Sons, a sitcom about

"I WAS A PLASTIC BAG WITH ALL MY ORGANS EXPOSED, SOBBING ON AN AUDITORIUM CHAIR. I WROTE *BLUE* IN THAT CONDITION."
JONI MITCHELL

a single dad's misadventures in raising kids. But his run had ended three years earlier, so he had turned to screenwriting and tinkering with photography. He was a music fan, too, during a boom in California's folk rock scene.

"I went to a Judy Collins concert, and she sang Both Sides Now. I thought, 'Wow, that's a *great* song,'" says Considine. Collins had already recorded the song, but it was months away from becoming her hit. "And she said, 'If you like that song, wait until you hear the person who wrote it, Joni Mitchell.' That seemed like an extraordinary thing for an artist to say."

Considine took Collins' advice. Weeks later, early in June 1968, Mitchell was making her debut at The Troubadour, the now-iconic club just off the Sunset Strip. Considine lived a mile away and recognised an opportunity in the club's famously dim lighting. He'd been experimenting with a new film that could capture elegant portraits in low light. "It was like a tunnel, so dark," Considine says. "So I thought, 'Let's give this a try.'"

Tunnel vision: (right) photographer Tim Considine in TV acting days with My Three Sons co-star Meredith McRae, 1965; (insets from bottom) the first big Joni cover version; Nash whispers sweet nothings; Isle Of Wight festival poster; the *Blue* album cover.

He was taken by Mitchell, particularly the dynamic sweep of her voice. He pulled out his camera and eased toward the stage. People scoffed, amused that he thought he could get a worthwhile photo. Back home, he was stunned with the results, particularly how the sharp grain of the film made Mitchell look like a Greek statue, a wash of marble beauty emerging from shadow. He made a few 11-inch by 14-inch prints and returned to The Troubadour the following night, climbing to the tiny dressing room to seek out Mitchell.

"She seemed really pleased, and I felt about nine feet tall," says Considine. "But then David Crosby came in, looked at them, dismissed them, and said to me, 'Needs more contrast.' I thought, 'Bitch!'"

But after Considine developed the photos for a second time, he realised that Crosby, who was the son of an acclaimed cinematographer, was right. And when Mitchell returned to the club for a six-show stand there in January 1969, so did Considine, with his camera in hand. He found Mitchell in the Troubadour's ➢

"AFTER GRAHAM AND I SEPARATED, I WAS REALLY DEPRESSED. I BELIEVED IN THAT RELATIONSHIP, AND SUDDENLY IT WAS OVER."
JONI MITCHELL

➢ upstairs green room, lit by streetlights and signs outside. She was painting a Valentine's Day present for Graham Nash, The Hollies star who had arrived in Los Angeles since her first show at The Troubadour and had almost immediately moved in with her. Considine shot a double-exposure of Mitchell, juxtaposing her portrait and a wider frame that shows her painting. "And the light was just magnificent," he remembers. She was practically glowing.

On Nash's first night in town, in 1968, Mitchell rescued him from a wild party at Crosby's, tugging on his arm and saying, "Come to my house, and I'll take care of you," he later wrote. By April 1969, they represented a picture of domestic Laurel Canyon bliss, their house brimming with instruments, an elk's head, two cats and a lamp designed as a frog holding a lily pad. They went into creative overdrive. Mitchell painted incessantly while self-producing her second album, *Clouds*. Nash worked at stained-glass and photography while Crosby, Stills & Nash cut their debut.

And he doted on Mitchell. During an April 1969 New York Times profile of the pair in their Laurel Canyon nest, Nash promised Joni a kiss because he liked her new version of Both Sides, Now so much. "You would've kissed her, man, if she would have spit," Elliot Roberts quipped. "There sure is a lot of love in this house."

Nash wrote that scene, of course, into the blissful Our House, where her love made everything that used to be so hard so easy. It is an anthem of unqualified happiness. "We were married, you might say," Mitchell, who had split with her first husband a year before inviting Nash over, told Cameron Crowe in 1979.

Mitchell's songs for Nash, though, radiated equivocation. In Willy, recorded for 1970's *Ladies Of The Canyon*, she worries that it's too good to be true, that he "gave [his] heart too soon." Its corollary, My Old Man, is an ode to her happiness when he's near and a confession of her blues when he's gone. "We don't need no piece of paper from the city hall," she sings, her voice diving and rising with the same doubts. "Keeping us tied and true, no."

Indeed, it didn't last. Late in 1969, the relationship disintegrated: a mixture of Nash's self-proclaimed insecurity, her romantic restlessness, and his clandestinely narcotised life with the suddenly famous Crosby, Stills & Nash.

"After Graham and I separated, I was really depressed," Mitchell admitted to Marc Myers in Anatomy Of A Song. "I believed in that relationship, and suddenly it was over. I also lost most of my Los Angeles friends, who had been my constant community. When I left him, they took his side."

SO MITCHELL FLED, FIRST TO CROSBY'S BOAT, A Belize-built schooner named The Mayan he'd purchased in 1969. But when she climbed aboard in Jamaica in early February, Nash was there, too. She felt she'd been hoodwinked by Crosby, a mentor who had encouraged her to move to Los Angeles and produced her first album, *Song To A Seagull*. After passing through the Panama Canal, she flew to California and joined ➢

"*Blue* without the severe daguerreotype album cover processing," says photographer Tim Considine; (above left, from left) John Sebastian, Nash, Mitchell, David Crosby and Stephen Stills on-stage at Big Sur Folk Festival, Esalen Institute, California, September 13-14, 1969; (inset) Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's single Our House.

Main image: Tim Considine Productions (author@yanksatlemans.com), Getty

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WAY TO BLUE

THE ROAD TO JONI MITCHELL'S FIRST MASTERPIECE, BY VICTORIA SEGAL.

➤ a poetry-writing pal, Penelope Ann Schafer, *en route* to Greece.

At home with Nash in 1969, Mitchell had claimed that nascent fame and her escalating schedule had cost her the space and time to write. She intended to take four months off at summer's end to live a little and focus on new material. "There is a certain amount of life in all my songs," she would later tell Melody Maker. "If I have any personal philosophy it is that I like truth." This was her chance to live a little, to find new truths for tunes.

After tooling around Athens, the pair heard that, since the early '60s, hippies had flocked to the island of Crete, where they lived in seaside caves carved into soft sedimentary rock in the fishing village of Matala. They hopped on a ferry, rented a VW Beetle, and found a cinderblock hut beside a poppy field. An explosion at Delfini's, one of Matala's two taverns, sent a cook sailing through the doors. Mitchell had to meet this character.

Cary Raditz was a North Carolina copywriter who decamped to Greece to get away from the stateside grind. Mitchell was smitten.

"He had steely-cold blue eyes and a menacing grin," she told Myers, "and he was a bit of a scoundrel."

For nearly two months, they were inseparable, hiking through the hills in clunky boots, swimming in the sea in the buff, learning yoga from Yogi Joe, and sleeping in Raditz's cave on a stone-slab bed covered with pebbles, grass, and a rough Afghan rug. Mitchell would sometimes disappear into the countryside carrying her dulcimer, a rare instrument built in California by exclusive luthier Joellen Lapidus. Escaping the gaze of the hippies who knew who she was, she wrote Carey, an intoxicating epic about her Matalan adventures and substandard living conditions. She adored Raditz but longed for "my clean white linen and my fancy French cologne".

She sang it for him on her birthday, both as a gift and a farewell letter. She flew to Paris, then "caught a plane to Spain," partying and playing dulcimer alongside Nico at the Ibiza home of Rolling Stone co-founder Jann Wenner. But she began to feel the pull of an idealised California, before The Fall, and captured that longing in the song she titled for the state. "I'm going to see the folks I dig/I'll even kiss a Sunset pig," she sang, nostalgic even, it seemed, for the cops on the Strip.

Still, the freedom of Matala clung to Mitchell like salt from the sea. "It was a lovely life, far better than being middle-class in America," she told Rolling Stone. "Even the poorest people seemed to eat well: cucumbers and tomatoes, oranges and potatoes and bread."

By late July, though, Mitchell's expedition led her back home to Canada, where she joined Elizabeth Cotton, Mississippi Fred McDowell, and Odetta at Toronto's Mariposa Folk Festival. There was a familiar face among the ranks – James Taylor, who had opened for Mitchell in 1969 and worked with her at the Newport Folk Festival.

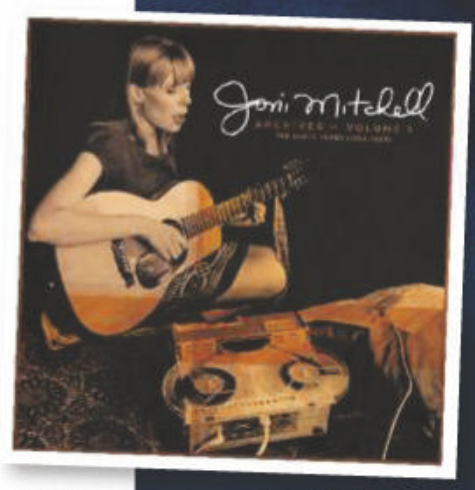
"She sang something while we sat in the grass, and she was tauntingly beautiful," Peter Asher remembers of the two at Newport. "I don't remember sparks flying across the room, but Joni was this very magnetic, very charming person. You could see her effect on all the men sitting around her. James was no exception."

This time, they became a couple. Mitchell joined Taylor when he filmed Two-Lane Black-

JONI MITCHELL ARCHIVES – VOLUME 1: THE EARLY YEARS (1963-1967)

★★★★

(Rhino, 2020)



This document of Mitchell's earliest career shows her outgrowing coffee-house folk repertoire, stretching out into her own songwriting. Urge For Going (recorded for *Blue*, then dropped) and Born To Take The Highway prefigure Carey and California's restless wandering, freewheeling through the old, the cold, the settled in its ways. Also included is a 1967 performance of Little Green, *Blue*'s blessing over the daughter she placed for adoption in 1965. Travelling, travelling, travelling.

SONG TO A SEAGULL

★★★★

(Reprise 1968)

"I'm the girl in all these songs," said Mitchell, but on her David Crosby-produced debut, she hadn't quite found the transparency that would define *Blue*. I Had A King was about former husband Chuck Mitchell, Crosby's hand was on The Dawntreader's tiller – but specifics often come veiled in fable, all galleons, castles and mountains. Cactus Tree, however, cuts to the core of an ongoing process: "She's so busy being free."

CLOUDS

★★★★

(Reprise, 1969)

The sun-flooded Chelsea Morning underlines Mitchell's A Case Of You claim that she lives in a "box of paints", but *Clouds* is bluer than the rainbows, butterscotch and oranges suggest. Songs To Aging Children Come and Roses Blue have a chill at their hearts, while Both Sides, Now – like Chelsea Morning, popularised by other voices – says goodbye to the fairytale, that self-portrait on the cover a move towards finding exactly where she stands.

LADIES OF THE CANYON

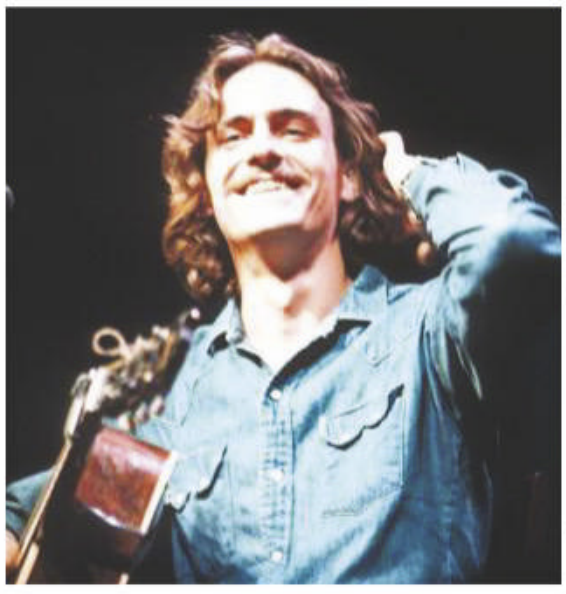
★★★★

(Reprise, 1970)

With piano shouldering guitar out the way on Rainy Night House and Willy, For Free's clarinet coda and Conversation's wild-side fade, *Ladies Of The Canyon* expands Mitchell's singer-songwriter palette. Closing with counterculture hits Big Yellow Taxi, Woodstock and The Circle Game, it decisively boxed up '60s folk utopia: by *Blue*'s California, peace "was just a dream some of us had" and the Me Generation was in full introspective flight.

Getty (4), Shutterstock, ©Karl Ferris

"JONI WAS THIS VERY MAGNETIC PERSON. YOU COULD SEE HER EFFECT ON ALL THE MEN SITTING AROUND HER. JAMES TAYLOR WAS NO EXCEPTION."
PETER ASHER



their world is a two-lane blacktop
no beginning... no end... no speed limit...
-TWO-LANE BLACKTOP-
JAMES TAYLOR · WARREN OATES
LAURIE BIRD · DENNIS WILSON

Home thoughts from abroad: (clockwise from above left) Joni on her travels reaches Ibiza, 1971, where she was inspired to write California after being taken to a party "down a red dirt road" with people "reading Rolling Stone and Vogue". She is drawn by Salvador Maron (child not model's own); Two-Lane Blacktop movie poster; on-stage at the Mariposa Folk Festival, Orillia, Ontario; James Taylor at the same event; young Americans living in caves, Matala, Crete; Mitchell with an Appalachian dulcimer, 1971.

top, a movie about itinerant outlaw drag racers, in the New Mexico desert late that summer, knitting him a sweater vest by the pool. She wrote the experience into All I Want, a song about the extreme emotional vicissitude of falling in love: "I want to knit you a sweater/Want to write you a love letter." Alongside Dennis Wilson in an RV, they drove to a Hopi ceremony with snakes and dancing, an occasion Mitchell would directly reference at Isle Of Wight when she called the attendees tourists.

"Why would you *not* want to hang out with James Taylor, for God's sake?" Nash told Michelle Mercer for her inquisitive analysis of Mitchell's *Blue* period, Will You Take Me As I Am. "Just look at him."

You could hear their chemistry, too. In late October, the new couple recorded a set for the BBC at London's Paris Theatre. They introduced each other's songs, finished each other's choruses, and giggled at each other's jokes. When she explained the curious immigrant history of the dulcimer, she said, "It's a truly American folk instrument, right?" The Canadian paused, as if awaiting the North Carolina-raised Taylor's seal of approval. They played her Carey, then his Carolina In My Mind.

During that trip, Mitchell and Taylor shared a flat with Asher and his wife, Betsy Doster, complete with a harpsichord and piano. Asher remembers her sitting down to rehearse Blue, an incisive and patient ballad she'd just finished about the pain and perseverance of romance and, really, living. It stunned Asher in the same way that hearing I Want To Hold Your Hand for the first time did, back when he and Paul McCartney shared the top floor of his family's London home at 57 Wimpole St.

"It was one of the most beautiful things I'd ever heard," he says today. "It's hard to be analytical in those moments. You just say, 'Please play it again.' It registers as beautiful poetry, but you haven't figured it out. Hearing it was an experience I wanted to repeat."

The new first couple of singer-songwriters fell for one another so deeply that Mitchell accompanied Taylor to Chapel Hill for Christmas, where his father, Ike, was about to finish his tenure as the dean of the medical school at the University Of North Carolina. Mitchell, it seemed, was joining what Rolling Stone would soon call "The First Family of the New Rock." Taylor helped his father cut down a Christmas tree. The couple carolled through the neighbourhood, joined by Taylor's childhood friend, the journalist David Perlmutt. They even showed up on the doorstep of UNC's already-legendary basketball coach Dean Smith.

"As the carollers circled around Morgan Creek, David lip-synched his way through Silent Night, in part so that he could listen to James and Joni sing," Will Blythe wrote in The Oxford American, recounting Perlmutt's memory of the night. "Why listen to himself when such beautiful voices were ringing out behind his ears?"

With her dulcimer and his guitar, Mitchell and Taylor even played an impromptu fireside concert in the living room, performing Taylor's Fire And Rain and three songs that Mitchell had yet to record – the Crete songs, Carey and California, and the lovesick A Case Of You. Months later, when Mitchell released *Blue*, some in attendance wondered if the native of cold Canadian prairies had written River, perhaps the definitive ode to Christmas's bittersweet sting, about her time in Chapel Hill. It "stays pretty green" there, after all, even in winter.

Continues on page 74

"FOREVER POIGNANT. FOREVER PRECISE"

BLUE, TRACK BY TRACK, BY JONI MITCHELL'S PEERS AND PARTISANS.

SIDE 1

ALL I WANT

Robin Pecknold (Fleet Foxes): I was 15, 16 and had started writing songs, and at some point my dad said I should listen to *Blue* and *Blood On The Tracks* – because those are, like, the bibles of songwriting. So I had a fall and a winter driving around rainy Seattle in my 1980s Toyota Camry listening *only* to those records.

I started learning all the songs on *Blue* and playing them at coffee shops, and for All I Want, because I wanted to do it right, I had to buy a dulcimer. The song is all about how little you need to be infinite, and the dulcimer is definitely a part of that. Dylan is like, I only need 6 strings. Joni's like, I only need 4 – total flex!

All I Want is like the overture to *Blue*, setting up the mission statement that this is going to be about relationships, and we even get the first appearance of the word **"blue"**, with that amazing melody, **moving** from the G to the F for "…so **I hurt** you too". It's a master level **move.**

There's stuff on *Blue* that I think about almost every day. Even [from River] "I'm gonna make a lot of money and quit this crazy scene" – I aspire to that sometimes! Some people have the Bible and I have *Blue*.

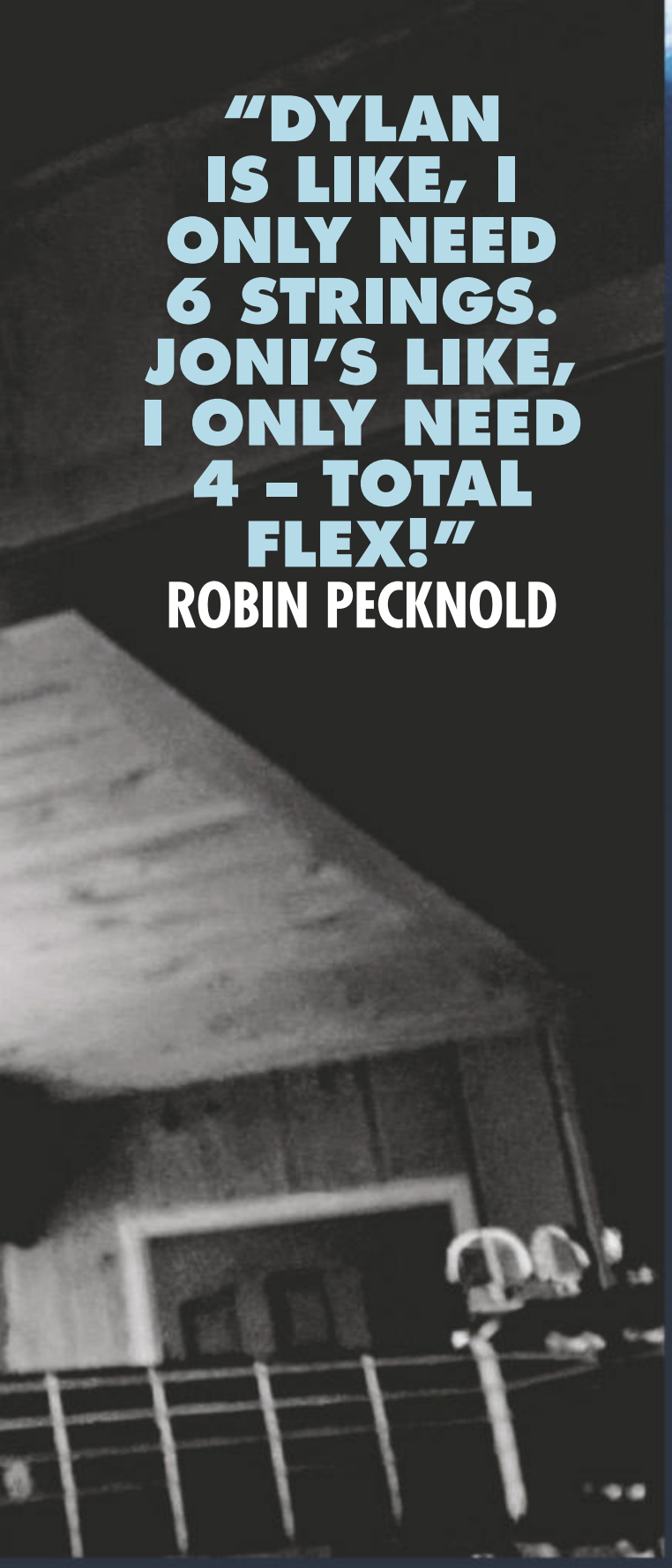
MY OLD MAN

Natalie Mering (AKA Weyes Blood): My Old Man is a beautiful song, and not the kind of love song Joni Mitchell wrote very often. Maybe Night Ride Home [from 1991], when she was married to Larry Klein, is similar. The lyrics feel quite old school but I think she's playing it that way because she had to. I'm sure she did cook this guy's meals and darn his socks – feminism hadn't caught up with music people yet. That said, I think the line – "We don't need a piece of paper from the city hall…" was a radical statement at the time: Yeah, we're living together but we're not getting married. We don't need to do that.

Musically, I think it's one of the first big tip-offs of what's to come from Joni – the start of that piano style you hear more of on *For The Roses*. She uses these chromatic half-steps – which gives it an angular modern sound, like blues and gospel meets jazz and even a Charles Ives atonal thing.

Joni is hard to cover well, because if you try to do the songs simply, and kind of flatten out the idiosyncrasies, it doesn't sound

Getty, Alex Lovell-Smith, Jeff Bierk, Shervin Lainez, Tony Hauser, Anna Webber, Zackery Michael, Ray Di Petro



"DYLAN IS LIKE, I ONLY NEED 6 STRINGS. JONI'S LIKE, I ONLY NEED 4 – TOTAL FLEX!"
ROBIN PECKNOLD

so good. Because it's her individual timing and strangeness that gives it the transcending feel. The songs on *Blue* are like one-time things. Like if she'd recorded them the next day they'd have sounded completely different.

LITTLE GREEN

Nadia Reid: I think on first listen it's possible to mistake Little Green for being about a lost love. It's so poetic and mysterious. If the story about the daughter she gave up hadn't surfaced in the '90s we may never have figured it out.

But knowing what we know, I can't think of a more tender, or braver song. It's heartbreaking, yet I never feel too saddened by Joni's songs. She takes grief and pain and turns it into something useful, something that lasts for ever. So if anything, I get this intense comfort. I hear this deep wisdom. Joni knows something that I want to know.

CAREY

Laura Marling: Though I believe the idea that songs need narrative context is a trend, not a necessity, I was delighted to find out many years after first hearing *Blue* that Carey was a real person: this eccentric American Mitchell met in Crete, and found sufficiently beguiling to memorialise in song.

The language places it firmly in its era. The "finest silver" she promises to put on, the "clean white linen" and "fancy French cologne" she says she misses, they're signifiers of a certain type of glamour that feels of another time. And of course "you're a mean old daddy, but I like you" is a beautiful piece of time-stamped language. I'm unsure of the provenance of the use of "daddy" in this context, and if I were the author's analyst I might suggest we delve deeper into that word, but as another stroke on the canvas, it serves a purpose perfectly, rapidly giving dimension to their relationship. Mitchell is full of detail, which is precisely what allows the listener, standing back and taking in the scene as a whole, to feel the mood so intensely. She is a true artist.

BLUE

Rufus Wainwright: When I was asked to sing at the concert that celebrated Joni's 75th birthday [in Los Angeles, November 7, 2018] Blue hadn't been taken yet, and the general consensus seemed to be that people were a little bit afraid of it. Even for Joni, it's unusual and challenging and unique, so indicative of her style and essence and so *vertical*, vocally. I kind of thought of it as an aria. So for a month or so I was pretty terrified of it too.

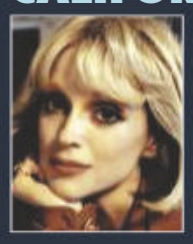
Thankfully, the day it really clicked was at rehearsal, and it happened that Chaka Khan was waiting to do her song after mine. She was my only audience member and I thought, "Well, I'm really going to have to take this up a notch – I mean, Chaka Khan is staring at me!" And magically, it really worked.

As someone who has struggled with addiction, the song touches a raw place. It's sung from the perspective of someone *witnessing* this downfall, so I would put myself in the place of my father or mother watching me go through that. Joni communicates what's tragic – chastising the user somewhat. But you know that she gets it. She's in there with you.

Like the tattoo in the song, for me it's the album's anchor.

SIDE 2

CALIFORNIA



St. Vincent: I don't mean to make this about me, but I have often felt I could understand Joni on a purely logistical level. I too, have sat on a bench in Paris, France, while on tour reading the news from back home. Wondering if the love you left there will love you when you get finally get home. Feeling at once at home on the road and at home nowhere. Nobody but Joni could pack so much heavy into a song that feels like spring birds flitting around Laurel Canyon.

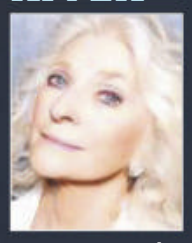
THIS FLIGHT TONIGHT

Tamara Lindeman (The Weather Station): The first time I heard *Blue*, I didn't get it. I think in part, it was my youth. Joni on this record is so vulnerable that it's kind of frightening. I didn't want to be like that myself. But obviously, I came around to it!

I've been on a lot of planes and I really relate to the existential moment she's having on this one. It's a tangled statement. She seems to be constantly disagreeing with herself: I love you; I miss you; you hurt me. "Star bright, star bright, you've got the loving that I like, alright," then immediately turning to regret and then to anxiety. I love the rock band part [from 1:56 to 2:05] when she puts the headphones on. It's like she's running away from herself, to get away from her head.

After *Blue*, Joni really grew and changed. I happen to think she got better at everything. But there's a purity to *Blue*, an unfiltered quality that was kind of her gift to music. It's not polished. It's not a fantasy. It's vulnerability and uncertainty and confusion, and it's perfectly expressed in this song.

RIVER



Judy Collins: I've been enchanted by Joni's songs ever since I first heard that clear, bell-like Canadian voice of hers. There was a charm and a luminescence, and her turn of phrase was spellbinding.

But on *Blue* – and River especially – she reached above and beyond my wildest expectations. During that time, she and I were involved with CSN in personal ways – she had been in a relationship with Graham Nash and I'd been having an affair with Stephen Stills. In 2019, what seemed like one million years later, I was recording my 54th album, *Winter Stories*, with Norwegian singer Jonas Field and Chatham County Line, a bluegrass group from North Carolina. In our rehearsals in Raleigh, in November 2018, River made it to the top choices for the album. When I started to sing the song, I was in tears.

Joni is indelibly timeless in her lyrics, fresh and remarkably poetic even in the fiercest of her plots. Think of Free Man In Paris or The Magdalene Laundries off *Turbulent Indigo*. Forever poignant, forever precise. That's our Joni. Our only.

A CASE OF YOU

David Crosby: I love everything about A Case Of You. When she first sang it to me, it blew me away. But this happened to me every time I heard a song of hers, man. She was my old lady for a year, and I would write something I thought was really good and she would come back with *three* things she wrote the night before, and they'd all be better.

A Case Of You is so open and so her. She's telling you the truth. And she utterly hooks you from that conversation at the start of the song: "If you want me I'll be in the bar." It's a tough woman who's got her dukes up about life, and she's got an opinion, and that's Joan.

That line: "I could drink a case of you and still be on my feet." There's a duality there that's deliberate. On the one hand she's saying she can't get enough of him. But she's also telling him, You can't bowl me over. Because you know she'd been through some serious trials and tribulations. Polio. Chuck Mitchell – not a good experience. She'd paid her dues.

She knew what pain was.

***Blue* is the best record by the best singer-songwriter of our times. A Case Of You is a face photographed under a bright light.**

THE LAST TIME I SAW RICHARD

Elvis Costello: A full stop at the end of a beautiful page.

A bad case of Joni: "Like blues and gospel meets jazz and Charles Ives," says Weyes Blood of My Old Man (opposite page), while Elvis Costello comes to a full stop.

“HOLY SHIT! I AM SITTING HERE, AND JONI MITCHELL – THE MOST GORGEOUS ANGEL IN THE WORLD – IS PLAYING HER SONGS FOR ME!”
RUSS KUNKEL

Continued from page 71

For now, though, it was back to sunny California. Mitchell and Taylor had records to make.

LATE IN 1970, RUSS KUNKEL HAD WHAT HE calls 50 years later "my own little Joni Mitchell concert."

Only 22 at the time, Kunkel had quickly become one of Los Angeles' drumming hotshots, able to dig into the beat but also play lightly, as if accenting a track without touching it. He had worked for The Band, recorded with Dylan, and befriended Hendrix. And after he married Cass Elliot's younger sister, Leah, the entire rock world appeared to open up before him. The young couple remodelled an A-frame apartment above Elliot's sprawling Laurel Canyon spread, and moved around the time their son, Nathaniel, was born. Kunkel had met Mitchell years before while she cut her debut album with Crosby, and he'd since seen her around Elliot's in the afternoons. She asked him to play on *Blue* and if she might stop by.

"My first thought was, 'Holy shit, I am sitting here, and Joni Mitchell – the most gorgeous angel in the world – is playing her songs for me,'" says Kunkel, admitting to callow first impressions. He mostly listened, occasionally slapping his hands on his knees or reaching for bongos. Mitchell approved of this minimalism, his tacit concession to her own intricate metres. A few weeks later, he began arriving at A&M's tiny Studio C with a modest percussion kit, listening to Mitchell and falling in place.

"She dictated what the grooves were, just with her guitar parts," Kunkel says. "It was easy to get inside them. When I got into the studio, I fit into what she'd already recorded."

It was a busy time at A&M: just down the hall, The Carpenters were recording in Studio A, while Carole King was cutting *Tapestry* in Studio B. King described the *Tapestry* sessions as a family affair, with her husband, Charlie Larkey, playing bass and her longtime pal, Lou Adler, producing. Her kids would stop by, as did Mitchell and Taylor to sing Will You Love Me Tomorrow? Taylor himself was recording *Mudslide Slim And The Blue Horizon* nearby, with King and Mitchell both contributing.

Mitchell would have little of that. Her sessions were sealed to the extent that, when King's engineer requested access to the piano Mitchell was using, they had to sneak into Studio A while she was gone. After the last year, Mitchell needed a sanctuary.

"If you looked at me, I would weep," she told Musician in 1983. "We had to lock the doors to make that album. Nobody was allowed in. Socially, I was an absolute wreck. Imagine yourself stripped of all defences."

Four other people played on *Blue* – Kunkel, Taylor, Stephen Stills and pedal steel whiz Sneaky Pete Kleinow. But it's possible to listen from start to finish and barely notice them. Kunkel's Sonor drums and Kleinow's steel whinnies during California blend into Mitchell's sharp but shimmering dulcimer chords. Stills' bass line on Carey clings so closely to her see-sawing voice that it feels like a special effect. The players weren't assuming she'd keep their stuff, anyway. "She's so secure that, when she said hello and thanks for coming, I'd do what occurred to me," Stills tells MOJO today. "I was very clear that she was free to erase it."

In this secluded setting, Mitchell could let everything out, the first 27 years of her life's emotional detritus extracted in 10 multivalent songs. She had been playing Little Green, a number she revealed decades later was about giving up her daughter for adoption, since at least 1967. Floating through delicate acoustic guitar, its examination of lost innocence slipped seam- ➢

"I had a really beautiful experience": Willow Verkerk (in blue), daughter of Penelope Ann Schafer, with Joni and Sophie Verkerk; (bottom) Morning Glory Of The Vine, Mitchell and Schafer pictured below the poem Penelope.

"COME ON DOWN TO THE MERMAID CAFE..."

UNCOVERED: THE AMAZING STORY OF JONI'S SIDEKICK ON CRETE, PENELOPE ANN SCHAFER. BY GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN.

IN THE LORE around *Blue*, "Penelope" seems like some fictionalised goddess – the Ottawa poetess, as Joni Mitchell called her, who whisked the heartsick songwriter away to a transformational period on Crete, her mononym bestowed by Greek mythology. To wit, in previous essays about *Blue*, Penelope has never been given a last name.

But she is actually Penelope Ann Schafer, a best-selling Canadian poet, award-winning actress, Buddhist explorer, beloved impresario and mother of two, who had a decades-long and sometimes-contentious relationship with Mitchell. Her fascinating life can seem at times like a tall tale.

Born in 1939 in Victoria, British Columbia, she was raised by a Second World War hero, then starred in The Tragic Diary Of Zero The Fool, an acid trip of a film that inspired Werner Herzog. She worked for a drug cartel exchanging money in South America until she developed dysentery and returned to Canada, where she became a crux of the creative counterculture. And in the late '60s, she had a short-lived tryst with Leonard Cohen (possibly while he dated Mitchell) before convincing Mitchell, in 1970, to follow her to Crete, where Cohen had purchased a home a decade earlier.

"Penelope loved travelling, but she was also interested in philosophy, history, and architecture, so it was a spiritual pilgrimage," says Willow Verkerk, Penelope's eldest daughter and a philosophy professor and author in Canada. "My mom also admired Leonard as a Canadian songwriter and poet, so she would have been curious to see where he had gone."

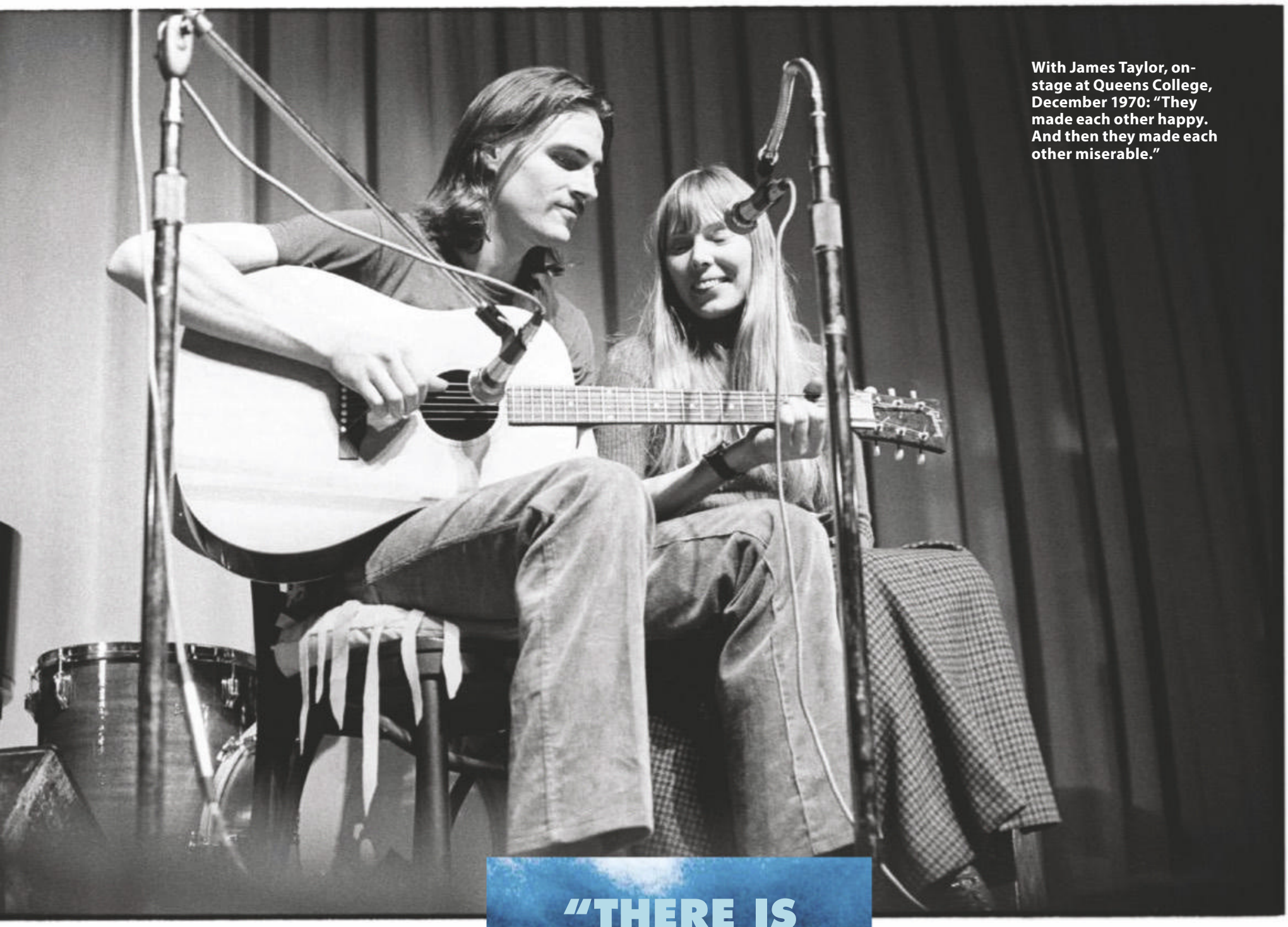
Indeed, Penelope penned a poem about her time with Mitchell on Matala, called Letter To Crete For Joni. She wrote of "growing wild with the mystics" and "a simple day/ spent learning to pray/in the sun." Mitchell, in turn, wrote a playful and lascivious poem about Penelope's lust for life in Crete: "Penelope wants to fuck the sea… She wrinkles up her nose and screams." In November 1970, after Mitchell had returned to the United States, she recited the poem on-stage with Frank Zappa. Verkerk still owns the 58th handmade copy of Mitchell's Morning Glory On The Vine book, a photo of her mother and Mitchell affixed beneath the poem titled Penelope.

"MOM SAID JONI WAS TOO MATERIALISTIC, THAT HER FAME WAS GETTING TO HER."

After Penelope's second husband died in an accident in 1982, Mitchell was around more, even teaching Verkerk a little piano. But they were both opinionated, obdurate people, unafraid of telling their version of the truth. As Mitchell's star rose, Penelope worried that money was warping her. After Penelope died in 2011, a mutual friend said she would tell Mitchell, but Verkerk never asked how Joni responded.

"I remember asking my mom if Joni was coming to visit us, because I had a really beautiful experience with her, a nice feeling," she says. "But mom said Joni was too materialistic, that her fame was getting to her."

Shutterstock, Courtesy of Willow Verkerk



With James Taylor, on-stage at Queens College, December 1970: "They made each other happy. And then they made each other miserable."

©Sherry Rayn Barnett

lessly into *Blue*, as though its happy "icicles and birthday clothes" were metaphorical contrasts for its unnamed sorrows.

In some ways, its inevitable acceptance of hardship offers the anticipatory inverse of The Last Time I Saw Richard, the fraught piano finale about refusing to accept the doomed news of love. Richard warns her about the sad, cynical fate of romantics. "All good dreamers pass this way some day," she rebuts, her suddenly frail voice almost buckling beneath the burden. "Only a dark cocoon before I get my gorgeous wings and fly away."

Mitchell finished *Blue* early in the spring – a little more than a year since she arrived in Crete, about half a year since she made the beast lay down on the Isle Of Wight. Her relationship with Taylor didn't really survive the sessions, becoming a casualty of their individual struggles for meaning. Taylor was there to play guitar on *Blue*, but, for Mitchell, that was the extent of his support.

"James was a walking psychological disaster, anyway," Mitchell told Mercer decades later. "He was in no position to point a finger."

Or, as Asher puts it: "Joni and James made each other happy. And then they made each other miserable."

"THERE IS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF LIFE IN ALL MY SONGS. IF I HAVE ANY PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY IT IS THAT I LIKE TRUTH."
JONI MITCHELL

NEARLY THREE YEARS AFTER TIM CONSIDINE snapped his low-light photos of Mitchell during her Troubadour debut, Gary Burden called. Despite Crosby's criticism, Mitchell had held onto Considine's photo and hoped to use it for the cover of her new album. By that point, Burden was an icon of record art, having worked with Neil Young, Steppenwolf, and The Doors. Considine loved his work and handed over the negative, never thinking about a fee.

"I have never given anyone a negative after that," says Considine, laughing and then sighing. "I like everything Gary ever did – except for *Blue*."

Burden bathed the picture in a blue light and sharpened the image until it looked almost like an antique daguerreotype – extreme contrast and edges, so that every crease of Mitchell's face looks deep, like a steep canyon on a topographical map. In 1968, Considine felt he had captured a certain softness; Burden, however, tapped Mitchell's experiences since, the windfall of highs and lows. Considine is still not sure who made the call, Mitchell or Burden, and it remains the only album cover he's shot.

Burden's version, at least, aligns with Mitchell's own take on that time, a moment when she felt so vulnerable she soon retreated to a cabin in rural Canada, where she planned to garden, maybe live without electricity, and write. After *Blue* was released in June 1971, she rarely appeared in public for the better part of a year. Never again would she make an album as exposed, unfiltered, and unflinching.

"I love that record more than any of them, really," Mitchell said in 1983, before her decades-long battle with its confessional legacy. "I'll never be that pure again." Ⓜ

The Reprise Albums (1968-1971) containing newly remastered versions of Joni Mitchell's Song To A Seagull, Clouds, Ladies Of The Canyon and Blue, is available in 4-CD, 4-LP and digital formats from June 25 through Rhino.

MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC

EDITED BY **JENNY BULLEY** jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk

"The kind of cataclysmic peak the group dubbed 'Godzilla'."

IAN HARRISON ON CAN, REISSUES P92

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Testament of youth

Virginian singer-songwriter freeze-frames formative scenes from her past on impressive third album. By **Victoria Segal**. Illustration by **Ian Wright**.

Lucy Dacus

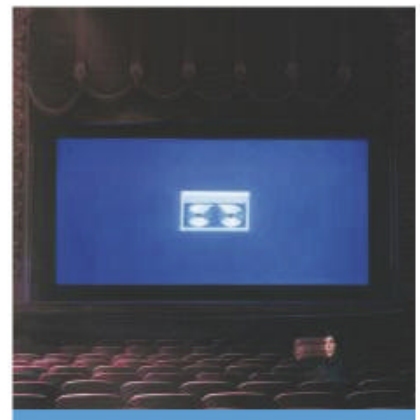
★★★★

Home Video

MATADOR. CD/DL/LP

LAST YEAR, with lockdown time on her hands, Lucy Dacus started to type up her old diaries (13 volumes in all). "I got to 100,000 words and that was only journal number four," she tells MOJO, "so there's a lot going on there." She also keeps an extensive catalogue of home videos, taken by her parents. "I like that weird feeling of 'Oh my gosh, I was an annoying kid,'" she says. "It's very humbling."

So far, the 25-year-old singer-songwriter (and alongside Phoebe Bridgers and Julien Baker, member of indie supergroup Boygenius) hasn't hidden her tendency to archive, document, keep emotional receipts. She titled her 2018 album *Historian*, a record that stored the details of break-ups and bereavements and, on its closing track, wondered who gets to control the narrative of a relationship. On her third album, *Home Video*, Dacus continues her recording, but this time, she digs further into the vaults. Feeling rootless since her 2016 debut *No Burden* triggered years of touring, she felt herself drawn back to her origin stories, her adolescence in the suburbs of Virginia's state capital Richmond, placing key scenes and situations from her youth under the microfiche reader for close analysis.



"Dacus zeroes in on grey areas. She feels it when people disappoint, miss their cues, fail to reciprocate."

While she taps into universally resonant themes with these songs – the limits of friendship, the pain of unrequited love, self-esteem and sexual identity, parents who go mad if you're late home – Dacus is too smart to deal in easy tear-and-share nostalgia. Her Christian upbringing gives a crisp specificity to Christine, an ambiguous love song that mentions "a sermon saying how bent on evil we are", or VBS (it stands for Vacation Bible School), a quietly devastating vignette about her first church-camp boyfriend. Secular seductions – listening to Slayer, bad poetry, "snorting nutmeg in your bunkbed" – clash with the opening line, "In the summer of '07/I was sure I'd go to heaven". It's not the only song where the adult world looms ominously, but it highlights Dacus's ability to zoom out from tiny detail into big picture. "You said that I showed you the light/But all it did in the end/Was make the dark feel darker than before," she sings, over unstable bursts of guitar and organ, a line that could have come straight from the old Bill Callahan songbook.

If the album's title suggests VHS footage full of wobble and flare, Dacus never descends into retro pastiche, elegantly co-producing with long-term Richmond collaborators Collin Pastore and Jacob Blizard (as well as Jake Finch). There's conspicuous Auto-Tune on Partner In Crime, its hint of pop worldliness reflecting the song's grown-up secrets and ebbing innocence, but nothing is overstated. It's softer and spacier than *No Burden* or *Historian*, sleepy piano running through Christine, Going Going Gone's willow-weave country sweetened further by backing vocals from Bridgers and Baker. Live favourite Thumbs – a Twitter account called Has Lucy Released Thumbs Yet? has been tracking its status for months – is a revenge fantasy about killing a friend's toxic dad that's delivered like a prayer, Dacus contemplating evisceration over cloudy, high-windowed keyboard. Storytelling this tight doesn't leave a lot of space around it for interpretation, but as an old-fashioned issue song – a trace of Suzanne Vega or 10,000 Maniacs – with a modern gloss, it's a powerful display of strength.

At other times, Dacus almost maintains a stenographer's distance, keeping a careful, fluent account but refusing to let emotion distort the record. "My heart's on my sleeve/It's embarrassing," she sings on Partner In Crime. "The pulpy thing, beating." Hot And Heavy, structured with skipping-song simplicity, describes a complicated attempt to go home again, memories of teenage passion in a suburban basement leaving her "hot in the face", people turning into volatile compounds as years pass: "You used to be so sweet/Now you're a firecracker on a crowded street."

It's a gift to be this lucid, especially given how *Home Video*'s songs often worry at the problems of really knowing other people. Dacus zeroes in on grey areas – of communication, love, sexuality, friendship. She feels it when people disappoint, miss their cues, fail to reciprocate. On Going Going Gone, there's an Americana snapshot of a braces-wearing teenage boy who 10 years later is "grabbing asses, spilling beers". The bitterly funny Brando is about another boy who tries to "educate" the young Dacus via cinema trips, a junior mansplainer who treats her as if she's a teenage Eliza Doolittle. "You called me cerebral/I didn't know what you meant," sings Dacus on one of the album's sharpest lyrics. "But now I do/Would it have killed you to call me pretty instead?" Cartwheel's sombre reverie, with its downward-spiral percussion and gentle despair, catches the pain of a friendship splitting apart, old dependencies ruined by new prospects of love and sex; while the closing Triple Dog Dare brings together repressed sexuality, religion, and fear of death in one poignant snapshot of thwarted connection.

In Brando, the teenagers visit a cinema where "They play oldies in the afternoon for the elderly and me and you/Fred and Ginger, black and white/I watch you watch It's A Wonderful Life". Yet that's not Dacus's kind of nostalgia: her interests lie not in immaculate cinema classics but in making sense of memory, its vivid home-taping striped by ticking timecodes and distorted by sudden static. "In five years I hope the songs feel like covers/Dedicated to new lovers," she sang on *Historian*'s Night Shift, expecting the meaning of her songs to change with the years. With *Home Video*, however, Dacus finds the pages of her diary she just can't shake, turning them into songs that are destined to stay with you, too. After all, there's a lot going on there.

BACK STORY: BITE CLUB

● "I am so happy, thank you everyone for doing this. I owe you all whatever you ask for me for the rest of my life!" The snippet of studio chat at the end of Going Going Gone is directed at Dacus's Boygenius compadres Phoebe Bridgers and Julien Baker, who also add backing vocals to haunting lament Please Stay. The trio released their self-titled EP in 2018, and the three members have a tooth tattooed on their hands as a souvenir – a reference to Dacus's track Bite The Hand. Other collaborators Collin Pastore and Jacob Blizard, meanwhile, are friends from teenage days. "We've made all three records together so it only gets easier the more we work with each other," Dacus says. "Every time, I've had one weeping-in-the-studio breakdown but that's more a release of emotions than actually being mad."

LUCY SPEAKS! DACUS ON BIBLE SCHOOL, REBELLION AND THE DANGERS OF OVER-SHARING.

Home truths: Lucy Dacus, seeking refuge in the past.

"Bible school was replete with drama."

Lucy Dacus speaks to Victoria Segal.

What sent you back to childhood this time around?

"I wrote a lot of the songs in 2018; even Hot And Heavy I wrote in 2017, so this train of thought has been chugging along for a long time. Once I started touring my first record, *No Burden*, I was away from home so much that I felt this depersonalisation – like I didn't know who I was without being at home. I think I had this impulse to ground myself in the past, which actually kind of worked. It's more comforting to me than the future."

Your songs are so personal and specific, do you worry about the subjects coming to find you?

"That's one of my biggest sources of anxiety right now because there's a lot of songs that are on the record that are about people I haven't spoken to for a really long time. I think in my previous records I've been really careful about not writing about people that I wouldn't want to hear from, but that cut me off from a lot of material. If people reach out to me, I am prepared to talk to them – it just makes my stomach hurt to think about it."

There's a song on *Home Video* called VBS, which stands for Vacation Bible School – did you like it there or was it a trigger for rebellion?

"At the time I really liked it because I really wanted things to happen in my life and Vacation Bible School was replete with drama: there was friendship drama, there was romance, there was the drama of being really emotional about God, meeting new people from different towns – it felt like one of the only accesses to drama. I didn't get a satisfactory rebellion though. In college over the course of the years, without noticing, I just stopped going to church. I realised that I just didn't believe some of the things or kept reframing them and reframing them until the point where I was 'should I actually call myself a Christian?' I wish that I had had a more remarkable rebellion but it was more like a slow fade that I didn't notice was happening."

You grew up listening to Christian rock and musical theatre – can you trace those influences in your music's DNA?

"I think if anything both of those forms of music serve a real purpose: for worship it's a connection point and for musicals it has to make the plot go forward, so I guess that I always thought of songwriting as more of a communication device than a fine art type of thing. I don't think that there's much of a Christian rock or musical theatre influence detectable. Hopefully not, because I think that both of those genres are a little overwrought."

Is your music a reaction against it, then?

"Maybe. I tried so hard to be so perfect for those settings. I sang in the church band. I was in musicals because my mom was a musical theatre director, but I've never been any good at being anything other than myself. I wish that I could put on a persona but I've never been larger than life – I've just been… life."

Wolf Alice

★★★★

Blue Weekend

DIRTY HIT. CD/DL/LP

North Londoners get it together Traffic-style at lockdown Somerset Airbnb.

Wolf Alice look back on their first decade by way of two Number 2 UK albums out of two, a Grammy nomination for Moaning Lisa Smile (rare among sincere Simpsons tributes) and a Mercury Prize. Ellie Rowsell (voice), Joff Oddie (guitar), Theo Ellis (bass) and drummer Joel Amey leant into tour fatigue by decamping to Somerset to crack third LP *Blue Weekend* with Arcade Fire producer Marcus Dravs. Lowdown opening salvo The Beach emerges from the tapping of a neighbour doing DIY, as Rowsell summons Macbeth ("When will we three meet again?") and sing-talks us through a dodgy hook-up ("Vibes are kinda wrong here; I think he is a bad man"). A breathy soundworld throbs with chillout opportunity and toggles toothache-sweet grunge-buzz, Laurel Canyon lilt (Safe From Heartbreak) and skyward soundtrack The Last Man On Earth. Alive with confessional ideas, even the lupine post-Pixies novelty Play The Greatest Hits should raise a happy howl.

Andrew Collins

Arooj Aftab

★★★★

Vulture Prince

NEW AMSTERDAM. DL/LP

An extraordinary new voice, from Pakistan via Brooklyn.

Perhaps the only album this month to have an "olfactory accompaniment", Arooj Aftab's Bandcamp page advertises that her third album can be bought with a bespoke perfume oil: "Clary sage," apparently, "captures the cylindrical cloud that weaves through each song and the soothing nature of Arooj's vocals." Happily, *Vulture Prince* works fine without its scent. Pakistan-born and Brooklyn-based, Aftab is a composer who threads Pakistani classical traditions, Western folk and chamber music, a little jazz, a little ethereal minimalism into a beguiling whole. Harp flourishes signal an affinity with Joanna Newsom, but Aftab's voice is very different: closer to Sade, even. Last Night, meanwhile, sets a Rumi poem to a folk-reggae skank, of sorts, but it's Saans Lo that provides the key to this wonderful record; a kind of Sufi analogue to Elizabeth Fraser and This Mortal Coil's version of Song To The Siren.

John Mulvey

Liz Phair

★★★

Soberish

CHRYSALIS. CD/DL/LP

Missing-in-action '90s confessor returns after 11-year absence.

In the years after Chicago's Liz Phair earned a reputation for stark alternative rock and provocative lyrics, she moved further and further into the mainstream and, with the jokey hip-hop of 2010's *Funstyle*, was swept away by it. *Soberish* reunites her with Brad Wood, the co-producer of her pre-pop high watermarks *Exile In Guyville* and *Whip-Smart*, though Phair's latter-day commercial smoothing remains. When it works best, in the Carly Simon driftiness of In There or the shapeshifting, Judee Sill-like folk-pop of Ba Ba Ba, it's clear that Phair has rediscovered her core strengths. Given that in 2019, she wrote a memoir, Horror Stories, the lyrical tones are generally reflective, though she still can't resist the weak "pussy" *double-entendres* of Bad Kitty. A mixed bag then, but a welcome return that promises much.

Tom Doyle

Billy Gibbons

★★★★

Hardware

CONCORD. CD/DL/LP

Solo LP three for ZZ Top's linchpin, the original Billy-Goat Gruff.

Recorded in California's high desert and tapping the region's mythos, *Hardware* recalls Gibbons' 2018 outing *The Big Bad Blues* rather than 2015's Cuban-influenced *Perfectamundo*, but a certain daring endures. "Gram died in room eight and left it all to Keith," rasps our host on Desert High, while rattlesnake percussion, sub-bass and a Theremin stramash ornament Spanish Fly (David Essex's Rock On as desert blues). With drummer Matt Sorum (The Cult, Guns N'Roses) anchoring proceedings and Larkin Poe's Lovell sisters singing enthused bv's on Stackin' Bones, Gibbons, too, sounds hungry; kicking up a storm on surf-gospel tune West Coast Junkie and savouring his itinerant storyteller role on country ballad Vagabond Man. It would be remiss, perhaps, not to offer a 'horny septuagenarian afoot' caveat, but Gibbons' gnarly guitars and sand-blasted voice are unimpeachable.

James McNair

Garbage

★★★★

No Gods, No Masters

STUNVOLUME/INFECTIOUS MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Seventh album from multi-million selling Scottish-American quartet; deluxe edition has a bonus disc.

As album-opening lines go, "The men who rule the world have made a fucking mess" is quite the statement of intent from a band who, these days, exist intermittently. Their line-up remains unchanged – keeping things in the family, singer Shirley Manson's husband Billy Bush co-produces – but on a record completed in Palm Springs the night before California went into lockdown, they've added anger to their traditional wall of ferocious sleekness built of sizzling guitars and unyielding electronica. The delightfully sweary Manson takes on Trump, misogyny, climate change and personal retribution against a backdrop which ranges from wind tunnel on Godhead and Wolves, to something more woozily trip-hop on This City Will Kill You and, on Waiting For God – the closest Garbage have come to a power ballad – the Black Lives Matter movement. Intermittent they may be, but never uncommitted.

John Aizlewood

Wolf Alice: a night on the growl.

Ebru Yildiz, Jordan Hemingway

Stage whispers

Kurt Wagner's new meditations and stardust memories. By **Tom Doyle**.

Lambchop: the mystery and magic of Kurt Wagner.

Lambchop

★★★★

Showtunes

CITY SLANG. CD/DL/LP

FOR NIGH on three decades, Lambchop have changed like slow-moving weather, as Kurt Wagner, now 61, has grown into his always oaky, now slightly timeworn voice. But if the core sound of his amorphous outfit has been an idiosyncratic kind of country soul, it enjoyed a technological jolt with 2016's *Flotus*, wherein softly pattering electronic beats conspired with an overtly-harmonised/Auto-Tuned vocal approach.

That same sound palette continued to create the colours for 2019's *This (Is What I Wanted To Tell You)*. Yet once again technology has brought another change, as the making of *Showtunes* found Wagner discovering how to digitally transpose his guitar onto MIDI piano (and finely edit or generally mess with the parts onscreen). Having built these unusual foundations, he then assembled a new cast of Lambchop collaborators, in Ryan Olson (Gayngs), Andrew Broder (Fog), trumpet/French horn player CJ Camerieri (Bon Iver; Paul Simon) and James McNew of Yo La Tengo on double bass.

The result is his most freely-flowing album since the sparse and beats-light *Is A Woman*, although this is a very different sonic world to that one he created 19 years ago. If the title of *Showtunes* could be at first read as ironic, there are actual hints of George Gershwin's or Hoagy Carmichael's melodic sweep in these songs, as Wagner sails his voice over ambient jazz washes and subtle electronics. More often, though, it sounds like The Blue Nile recording for ECM.

The ghostly atmosphere that lingers is aided by the recurring appearance of found voices: a female opera singer floating in and out of The Last Benedict; the cut-up, Walkman-quality soul hook snippets of Blue Leo, or Drop C's preacher asking, "Are you listening?", before being contorted beyond recognition. It's a tasteful, non-showy audio postmodernism that moves Lambchop into new territory and enhances Wagner's often impressionistic lyrics.

The overarching theme of *Showtunes*, meanwhile, is one of veering between thoughts of permanence and impermanence. In opener A Chef's Kiss, Wagner looks around him and decides that "the smell of gas and fresh-cut grass won't last beyond us at all", but then namechecks Spanish cellist Pablo Casals to hear "a final note that rings forever". Elsewhere, Unknown Man finds him hypnotised by an old photograph of a figure with "an Afro and a jumpsuit with pleats", frozen forever in black and white.

It's beautiful, meditative stuff, even though this may be a more "difficult" Lambchop, with less in the way of obvious melodies to ground the listener. Initially, at just 32 minutes and eight tracks (two of them instrumentals), it could also seem a slighter offering. But over time and repeated plays, *Showtunes* weaves its magic, maintaining its mysterious atmosphere throughout, along with a welcome sense of stillness amid life's ongoing dramas.

Angelina Castillo

Carter Tanton

★★★★

Carter Tanton

WESTERN VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Baltimore singer-songwriter finally follows early promise.

Carter Tanton's bio lists only one released bona fide solo record – 2016's *Jettison The Valley* – although this is actually the fourth under his own name. Once the singer for lost indie rockers Tulsa and sideman for War On Drugs and Marissa Nadler, the elusive Tanton considers his first two efforts false starts. This self-titled album, however, continues from where the Laurel Canyon stylings of *Jettison*… left off. Neil Young's *Harvest* still echoes through the acoustic guitar tracks, particularly the exquisite Steep Angles, which draws lines between Abraham Lincoln's assassin, a Baltimore dirt bike gang and the toppling of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol, but there's also a major reliance on piano ballads and heavily reverbed vocals. Haunting and obscured by a gauze-like haze, *Carter Tanton* is a tantalising album begging you to sit and spend some time with it, aching to be slowly picked apart.

Andy Fyfe

Marina Allen

★★★

Candlepower

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

From LA – a new Lady of the Canyon awaits.

Of the assorted images on *Candlepower*'s cover – conch shell, butterfly, a burning candle, two pearls and a horse – only a pearl reappears in the lyrics, to Believer: "At night I wonder to a deep, silent sea/ The pearl is awake and it's looking at me." Believer also includes the line, "Listening to *Hejira* through a blown-out freedom scheme." Joni's not the only Lady of the Canyon shaping this debut: Laura Nyro and Judee Sill are the guiding lights for Reunion and Original Goodness respectively. But that's not *Candlepower*'s whole story, judging by Believer and Ophelia's beatnik jazzy, bass-heavy vibes. What pulls these strands together are Allen's exquisite melodies and cool, pure, dreamy delivery, which suggests she might one day live up to her influences. *Candlepower* isn't the full picture yet, and it only lasts seven tracks and 19 minutes, but it's a fine start.

Martin Aston

Daniel Bachman

★★★★

Axacan

THREE LOBED. DL/LP

Guitar master's hauntological survey of his Virginian homeland.

There are times on this latest album by the adventurous Bachman when he is captured playing guitar on the crackliest of microphones, muffled by wind and rain, as if a field recorder has cornered an endangered species out in the wild. Bachman made his cult-ish name as a blues and folk-inflected guitarist, sometimes in the company of Ryley Walker, but his music has always pushed further and more fearlessly towards the avant-garde. *Axacan* – named after a Spanish colony in what would become Virginia – is a particularly deep and immersive listen, with sound collages that treat the American South similarly to how the Ghost Box label reimagine Old England. One track, Ferry Farm, is named after the Fredericksburg estate with connections to both George Washington and Bachman himself. Climate grief permeates the action, too: Blue Ocean 0 is a massive, ominous drone worthy of Éliane Radigue. But there's still room for Bachman's more conventional virtuosity, as the outstanding Coronach emerges as a 12-string exploration worthy of Jack Rose.

John Mulvey

Lou Barlow

★★★★

Reason To Live

JOYFUL NOISE. CD/DL/LP

Latest lo-fi dispatches from Dinosaur/Sebadoh man chronicle domestic bliss.

While Barlow's 4-track recorder has, over the years, paid unflinching witness to his darkest moments and some pretty gruelling music, this latest collection reflects his newfound equilibrium as father, husband and stable bandmate. While some tracks here grew from songs Barlow began as a teenager, there's a mature confidence to *Reason To Live*, the desolate chill and bared nerves of songs like Poledo replaced by warmth and insight, as Barlow sings of forgiveness (Love Intervene), of rejuvenating love (Paws), of childhood memories (Maumee). The frankness of yore remains intact, but his focus has shifted, and the intimacy that once sometimes made Barlow's solo work a white knuckle ride now amplifies the tranquility of these strums. The imperfectly perfect pop of Privatize's hazy Byrdsian tangle and the keening, yearning uncertainty of Tempted are up there with Barlow's best.

Stevie Chick

Ready to rebuild: Sleater-Kinney's Corin Tucker and Carrie Brownstein.

Witness the fitness

In riot-strewn post-Trump America, Tucker and Brownstein get back to basics and count the cost. By **Stevie Chick**.

Sleater-Kinney

★★★★

Path Of Wellness

MOM + POP. **CD/DL/LP**

SLEATER-KINNEY'S last salvo, *The Center Won't Hold*, was a 'big' album in every sense. Their response to the darkness heralded by Trump's presidency, its theme was indicated by the apocalyptic title, and made explicit by tracks like Broken and Bad Dance, measuring the damage done and forging paths of resistance. The production – by Annie Clark, AKA St. Vincent – finessed their punk-born squall into something succinct, boldly augmenting their palette with electronic elements. While this shift was seismic enough to shake loose long-time drummer Janet Weiss, the experiment itself was a success.

By comparison, *Path Of Wellness* is less of a grand statement, more intimate and inward-looking. Self-produced, the album returns to Sleater-Kinney's bare elements: tangled, scorching guitar lines, and two singers of distinct but complementary passions. It's no backwards-step, nor a repudiation of Clark's (r)evolutionary strokes – the synths might have retreated, but Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker's pop sensibility is played firmly to the fore. And *Path Of Wellness* contains fine pop songs: the sly, erotic vibe of High In The Grass, the nervy, ecstatic strut of Brownstein's Worry With You. Sleater-Kinney have always thrived in that space where their classic song-writing impulses meet the inflamed pell-mell of their punk rock. This friction peaks on Shadow Town, its claustrophobic mood finding release in a nagging refrain and Tucker's howl, the once-untrammelled fury of her vocals now focused into something powerful and moving.

The album eschews *Center...*'s anthemic polemic in favour of subtly effective messages. Complex Female Characters is brilliant, a sophisticated, surgical deconstruction of toxic male gaze, Brownstein's subject claiming he likes "complex female characters/But I want my women to go down easy" and warning at the song's end "you can't escape my imagination", revealing the predator dressed as ally. Meanwhile, the pointedly anti-triumphant vibe that pervades the set finds its keenest expression in closer Bring Mercy. It's a smouldering response to the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent protests in their hometown of Portland, the violent confrontations between protestors, police and counter-protestors reflecting an America riven by division, guilt and denial.

The message of the chorus ("Bring mercy/Bring love") is as heartfelt as it is worthy, but the real truth of the song lies in the nuances arising in its verses, Tucker asking "How do you put out fires/When they're burning up your sleeves?" If *The Center Won't Hold* was Sleater-Kinney sounding the alarm as the house caught fire, *Path Of Wellness* finds them confronting the emotional toll of the crisis, gazing at the wreckage and wondering how to rebuild, how to make good. There are no easy answers, but the questions it asks, the disquiet it pays witness to, make for a deep, powerful and satisfying album.

Blackberry Smoke

★★★

You Hear Georgia

THIRTY TIGERS. **CD/DL/LP**

Atlanta rockers bottle the sound of a Southern roadhouse.

Loose Southern boogie may not be the most fashionable end of country rock, but few other acts have Blackberry Smoke's natural deep groove. With six previous albums and nearly two decades under their collective snakeskin belt, the band have trod a path all the way from the Allman Brothers' freeform jamming to The Black Crowes' zinging slide blues. Outlaw freedoms are cherished, anyone who would clip their blue collar wings can shove it, and the people of the South are just often misunderstood good ol' boys and gals. Which is fine as far as it goes, but deep into side two *You Hear Georgia* starts to drag a little as they ditch the choogle and attempt to foray into the cosmic Americana territory of My Morning Jacket. It's a step towards self-awareness that simply doesn't suit them or, most likely, their audience.

Andy Fyfe

Various

★★★★

Cold Wave

SOUL JAZZ. **LP/CD**

New series compiles contemporary European electronic acts inspired by their '70s/80s forbears.

Best known for digging up rare reggae, funk and soul treasure, Soul Jazz's insider knowledge knows few bounds. *Cold Wave* proves it, shining a light on below-radar electronic acts whose DIY ethos draws a line back to pioneers like Jacno, Marquis de Sade or Charles de Goal. This atmospheric first volume (a second is due next month) sets a template that lurches from the dubby dread oscillations of Brussels' Carcass Identity and sinister doom-mongering of Düsseldorf's Kreidler to the harsh, tense techno of Spain's Wang Inc. There's room too for peculiar pop, smuggled through the backdoor by Dutch masters De Ambassade and Paris producer Krikor Kouchian, whose Niños Matadores is a bonsai garden of unexpected delights. Crucially, it all feels cohesive, the first finds of an extensive dig.

Andy Cowan

Georgia Anne Muldrow

★★★

VWETO III

FORESEEN/EPISTROPHIK PEACH SOUND. **DL/LP**

Third volume of hip-hop instrumentals from neo-soul bohemian.

Georgia Anne Muldrow contains multitudes: singular neo-soul auteur, avant-funk instrumentalist and, as evidenced here, maverick hip-hop producer, with previous clients including Erykah Badu, Arlo Parks and J Dilla. Intended both as an album in its own right and a showcase for beats in search of vocalists, *VWETO III* occasionally struggles to transcend its origins as a collection of essentially unfinished pieces – moments where the absence of vocals seems acute and leaves the grooves wearing on aimlessly. More often, however, her lop-sided rhythms, offbeat electronics and uncanny sense of mood are compelling in their own right, as she sketches out wild concepts for weightless robo-funk (Boom Bap Is My Homegirl) and haunted electro-pop (Unforgettable), and pairs stumbling beats with acid-rock licks (Grungepiece). Her idiosyncratic aesthetic will win devotees among heads tuned to the wonky genius of Madlib and Flying Lotus.

Stevie Chick

Johnny Flynn & Robert Macfarlane

★★★

Lost In The Cedar Wood

TRANSGRESSIVE. **CD/DL/LP**

Actor and author makes romping and stomping long-player.

Best known for playing David Bowie in the Stardust film and for his role in The Dig, as a sideline Johnny Flynn has made albums for over a decade. Dr Robert Macfarlane writes books about the natural world. Together, they're partly inspired by The Epic Of Gilgamesh, a flood saga written around 2100BC, although their song Gods And Monsters concerns the grisly fate of one of its translators, the Victorian Syrian expert, George Smith. For all its lofty subject matter, *Lost In The Cedar Wood* is the raucous sound of modern-day sea shanties. Fiercely strummed, irresistibly catchy for the most part, and propelled by Flynn's part Captain Birdseye, part Dubliner Ronnie Drew vocals, it's a good-natured romp. Bonedigger is made for call and response over jugs of ale, while Tree Rings has a Lumineers-style stomp, but when they slow things down on Nether, there's shade as well as light.

John Aizlewood

Part Chimp

★★★★

Drool

WRONG SPEED. CD/DL/LP

Cheeky London sludge-rockers run gamut of over-amplification.

Formed from the ashes of '90s rowdies Ligament and Scarfo, this ribaldly christened ensemble led by fret-mangler Tim Cedar and skin-pounder Jon Hamilton have very seriously brought the noise for two decades now. Their fifth excursion opens at amps-on-11, fusing post-hardcore with doom-metal (think Dinosaur Jr. covering Electric Wizard) and only gets louder from there on. Given Cedar's long-running sideline as house producer/engineer at Camberwell's Dropout Studio, 'Chimp's max-volume immersion is always expertly realised on record. Here, One In The Eye matches primetime Loop's bone-splintering thrust, while Clever remaps The Jesus And Mary Chain's lurch through Syd Barrett's Vegetable Man with a strutting, Kiss-like momentum. When ex-Hey Colossus vocalist Tim Farthing arrives on It's True, Man to supersub Cedar's reedier imprecations with a gargling growl (about a Yuletide LSD binge, apparently), we're in the very filthiest neighbourhood of post-hardcore ultra-nasties like Killdozer and Cows. For the listener's every ear-bleeding requirement, *Drool* summarily delivers.

Andrew Perry

Crowded House

★★★★

Dreamers Are Waiting

PARLOPHONE. CD/DL/LP

First album in a decade from revitalised Neil Finn vehicle.

Brandon McClain

It's 35 years and several line-ups since Neil Finn's band first bothered the charts, and this latest iteration now includes Finn's sons Liam and Elroy on guitar and drums. Although the first sessions for the album were held in Los Angeles just before the 2020 lockdown, it's hard not to hear unintended prescience in the lyrics and even title of opening track Bad Times Good, but mostly the songs explore familiar Finn themes of love and family, Catholic guilt and eternal hope. The addition of his sons, however, sets *Dreamers Are Waiting* apart from the previous hit and miss reunited albums, the younger Finns dragging Dad towards a far looser sound than any Beatles-loving 62-year-old songwriter might hope for. Ironically, *Dreamers Are Waiting* is possibly the most Crowded House-sounding album Crowded House have made since their *Crowded House* debut.

Andy Fyfe

Francis Lung

★★★★

Miracle

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES. CD/DL/LP

Former Wu Lyf bassist invokes the spirit of Elliott Smith and others.

Three years after burnout Manchester buzz band Wu Lyf split in 2012, Tom McClung detoured into a stop-start solo career that has increasingly revealed a real melodic gift. This second album brings his talents into sharp focus, while tackling the sadly well-worn territory of mental health and substance abuse with a certain reflective calm and uplifting resourcefulness. It's playful too – hangover pop song Bad Hair Day gear-shifts tempos between strummy '80s indie and dreamy passages that recall Teenage Fanclub's version of Big Star. Traces of The Beatles and The Beach Boys blow through without Lung losing his musical character, which for the most part is shaped by Elliott Smith. Even still, both the title track and Comedown (Again) are arguably up there with some of Smith's best, and throughout Francis Lung turns dark emotions into bright and welcoming songs.

Tom Doyle

James

★★★★

All The Colours Of You

VIRGIN. CD/DL/LP/MC

Their 16th studio album, but first produced by Jacknife Lee.

For a band who seemed on the verge of implosion during their Sit Down pomp, James have proved to be admirably indestructible. With singer Tim Booth residing in California, they're bi-continental these days and with their 40th anniversary looming, they're at a late-period peak. In Booth's Topanga Canyon neighbour Jacknife Lee, they've found the man to give these big songs the big production they need, adding layers of richness, from the choir on Wherever It Takes Us to Hush's techno pulse. Very much an Englishman abroad, Booth rails against Trump on the lockdown anthem title track and gets caught in a California firestorm on Beautiful Beaches. The centrepiece, though, is Recover, which details Booth's father-in-law's death from Covid-19: when, over the course of one heart-stopping verse, he charts a decline from sniffling to assisted breathing, it's the most moving writing of his career.

John Aizlewood

Riley Downing

★★★★

Start It Over

NEW WEST. CD/DL/LP

Stylish retro country and soul from deep-voiced Deslonde.

Riley Downing's solo debut is an immensely enjoyable and varied set that keeps returning to an intriguing conceit: what if the young Johnny Cash had spent time soaking up the New Orleans sound at Cosimo Matassa's place? Downing, from Missouri, has spent time in New Orleans himself, as part of the rambunctious Deslondes, a country and soul collective who operated a little in the shadow of Alynda Segarra's Hurray For The Riff Raff. The Deslondes were blessed and perhaps cursed with a surfeit of decent singer-songwriters, and Downing's gruff classicism deserves a full turn in the spotlight. Hence *Start It Over*, swinging effortlessly between stride-piano R&B (Deep Breath is roughly a slouchy rethink of Allen Toussaint's Fortune Teller), closing time doo wop (Won't Somebody Play) and, at its most contemporary, widescreen country akin to Jack White's rootsier moments (Raconteur Jack Lawrence guests on bass). A lugubrious good time all round.

John Mulvey

Various

★★★★

The Problem Of Leisure: A Celebration Of Andy Gill And Gang Of Four

GILL MUSIC. CD/DL/LP/MC

Twenty covers of the post-punk pioneers in tribute to late guitarist Gill. No duds. Artwork by Damien Hirst.

At their best the Gang Of Four attained a spiky, pared-down, near-perfect balance of guitar, bass, drums and voice. This must make interpreting their material a tad daunting, but here it actually seems to have had a galvanising effect on artists interpreting the Leeds band's catalogue. Idles and Tom Morello score highly by taking an edgy staccato approach, faithful to the original songs, but La Roux's synthy take on Damaged Goods teases out an unexpected amount of melody, and Gary Numan and Ade Fenton deliver an ominous, sonically massive and appropriately cold version of Love Like Anthrax. Gail Ann Dorsey's We Live As We Dream Alone is soulful and sensuous and The Sounds deliver a brash, poppy version of I Love A Man In Uniform. Gang Of Four sang presciently about how entertainment corporations can invade the consumer's private space, but in this particular case that feels like a positive thing.

Mike Barnes

Faye Webster

★★★★

I Know I'm Funny Haha

SECRETLY CANADIAN. CD/DL/LP

Atlantan country-soul prodigy's exceptional fourth album.

SUPERFICIALLY, FAYE Webster shares a few key moves with the current hip crop of US singer-songwriters typified by Phoebe Bridgers: reflexive wit; confessional directness; musical understatement. Where Webster stands apart, though, is in how her music tends towards warm, muted country soul rather than indie folk. The impeccably droll *I Know I'm Funny Haha* picks up very much where 2019's equally fine *Atlanta Millionaires Club* left off. Unobtrusive organic beats and pedal steel track Webster's moves, and her songs can initially seem featherlight. Don't be fooled: the likes of Both All The Time and Better Distractions (one of Barack Obama's favourites of 2020) are crafty, insidious creations, which gradually accrue substance and emotional heft even as they remain soothing on the ear. One to file alongside Natalie Prass's 2015 debut, and to bear in mind when album of the year season comes around.

John Mulvey

She got on her bike: Faye Webster, impeccably droll.

BLK JKS: exhilarating sounds of Soweto.

BLK JKS

★★★★

Abantu/Before Humans

GLITTERBEAT. CD/DL/LP

With this second long-player the Johannesburg four-piece fulfil their musical promise.

IN WINTER 2018, Mpumelelo Mcata, Molefi Makananise and Tshepang Ramoba, with newish recruit trumpeter Tebogo Seitei, transformed the Soweto Theatre Orchestra Pit into studio space and made a record. When the hard drives containing the recordings were stolen, undeterred they returned to re-record in just three days. The result is spectacular: the coming together of past, present and futurist Afro-diaspora sounds, to explore their homeland's cultural legacy. Opener Yela Oh! strikes an anticipatory warning with ostinato bass and chanting atop talking drums; Running – Asibaleki/Sheroes Theme's simmering volcano of psych, prog and Afro rock erupts midpoint into sparking township jazz. Then there's Harare's nurturing folk voiced by Morena Leraba and the hypnotic trance of Maiga Mali Mansa Musa, featuring Vieux Farka Touré and Money Mark. Altogether, an exhilarating, energised return.

Lois Wilson

Ryan Downey

★★★

A Ton Of Colours

DOT DASH RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Heart-on-sleeve follow up to 2018's *Running*.

A game of two halves here: side one is all bittersweet rainbows in puddles; side two is full of monotone melancholy. At his best, Melbourne crooner Downey is a master of swaggering, vulnerable lyrics and catchy melodies, doffing his cap to Kate Bush and David Byrne. Heart Is An Onion, the opener, hits you with art rock glamour, mixing Psychedelic Furs-style guitar propulsion with torch song intensity. Sors De Ma Tête could be Scott Walker singing Velvet Underground, producer Burke Reid (Courtney Barrett) drenching things in shameless, salty drama. Contact, detailing a failing affair, is majestic, lump-in-throat stuff: "And all the time you knew me/Was all the time you loved me." From these high points we arrive at a clutch of downplayed reflections. These might, with time, mean more; whatever, the first half deserves a ton of stars.

Glyn Brown

Nancy Wilson

★★★

You And Me

CARRY ON MUSIC. CD/DL

At 67, Heart's ever-glamorous guitarist makes solo debut.

Icons of female-led hard rock on 1973's *Barracuda*, then shoulder-padded staples of mid-'80s MTV, Heart's Anne and Nancy Wilson hit power-ballad paydirt with What About Love. Anne's formidable pipes still wow critics today, but it was Nancy who sang UK Number 8 These Dreams so beautifully. Comprising eight originals and four covers, *You And Me* is a decent if slightly disorientating hotchpotch, Sammy Hagar guesting on a fairly faithful cover of Simon & Garfunkel's The Boxer, Duff McKagan and Taylor Hawkins showing for bubblegum-rocker Party At The Angel Ballroom, and the title track conjuring Stevie Nicks circa Landslide. Another plus is Wilson's largesse, palpable on two nods to late friends. The Dragon is a mini epic for Alice In Chains' Layne Staley, while joyous guitar instrumental 4 Edward quotes the keyboard riff from Van Halen's Jump.

James McNair

Crumb

★★★★

Ice Melt

CRUMB. CD/DL/LP

Fast-rising East Coast indie quartet's second, tougher and chillier than 2019's *Jinx*.

Crumb formed at university in Massachusetts but have since applied their brainpower to gauzy, electronically tweaked indie rock that instantly found an audience (the title track of 2017 EP Locket has 60 million Spotify streams alone). Perhaps their appeal is down to singer-guitarist Lila Ramani sharing Phoebe Bridgers' balance of serenity and smouldering anxiety, albeit with treated vocals that sound like Ramani is trapped in a daydream, with eerier synth injections to match. The simultaneous warm/cold currents, recalling Broadcast, are reflected in Ramani's words. For a record marked by troubled love songs (Trophy is heaviest: "You're a dead-beat doll loner/House car bed trophy") and identity crises, Balloon is completely unexpected: a nu-disco shaker, with Ramani promising, "I'll be your guy or I'll be your girl/If you wanna get down on the floor."

Martin Aston

Brett Rubin

Gary Louris

★★★★

Jump For Joy

SHAM/THIRTY TIGERS. CD/DL/LP

Jayhawks man wears the trousers on lockdown LP from 'Pants Optional' Studios.

Full of searching, vulnerable moments, Gary Louris's second solo album brings minor-key irony to its title track and a Gene Clark-like ache to statuesque standout Too Late The Key. Only the perfectly turned, Tom Petty-simple Follow, which romances album dedicatee and new wife Stephanie, seems carefree; Louris too long in the tooth and too perceptive to avoid ambush by ever-useful sidekicks, poignancy and wistfulness. Shades of Harry Nilsson and the odd splash of Allman Brothers-like lead guitars further distinguish this one-man band outing, Louris appraising new vantage points – "Feel time passing around you/Going along without you," he sings on New Normal – and exploring what literature might have cost a great American novelist (Mr Updike). If you want to test the waters, White Squirrel, a shimmering beacon of misfit solidarity, is your failsafe.

James McNair

Juni Habel

★★★

All Ears

KOKE PLATE. DL/LP

Nordic singer-songwriter's debut long-player is a mood piece.

All Ears sounds as if it was recorded in an ancient woodland; as if embodying the slow but inexorable encroachment of dense undergrowth. Fittingly, Norway's Juni Habel is based in the rural hinterland surrounding capital city Oslo and her first album is more about atmosphere than dynamics. She's pointed to Vashti Bunyan and Jessica Pratt as inspirations but Play, the fourth track, has a Karen Dalton edge. Habel sets up circular acoustic guitar figures over which her direct, warm voice delivers reflections on the intangible aspects of relationships. Strings weave in and out, a pedal steel see-saws and body is brought by double-tracking her singing and the fleeting use of a second, male, voice on My Love (Is A Crazy One). Crescendos arrive on Demons and Eyes Shake, but overall, *All Ears* is a linear experience. Ultimately, there is one path through this forest.

Kieron Tyler

Merry Clayton

★★★★

Beautiful Scars

MOTOWN GOSPEL. CD/DL/LP

Famed backing singer Merry Clayton's gospel-inspired resurrection from tragedy.

The chilling cries of "Rape! Murder! It's just a shot away!" from The Rolling Stones' classic Gimme Shelter were sung by Merry Clayton and they added the truest grit. The church-rooted Clayton had a busy career as a backing vocalist, chronicled in the documentary 20 Feet From Stardom. In 2014 she was terribly injured in a car accident and this album's title song refers to her refusal to let her damaged body control her destiny. Clayton doesn't simply sing, she ecstatically wrings the meaning from each lyric, imbuing it with the Holy Spirit and her own astonishing strength. Love Is A Mighty River, co-written by Coldplay's Chris Martin, is a modern anthem. In her hands, the song's subject becomes God. (The same goes for Leon Russell's A Song For You.) The Ooh Child Medley closer, a duet with her granddaughter, also looks upwards – and forward.

Michael Simmons

Cheval Sombre

★★★★

Days Go By

SONIC CATHEDRAL. CD/DL/LP

Glacially beautiful second album of 2021 from psych-folk's dark horse.

Cheval Sombre's Chris Porpora talks of music as "something eternal, a refuge". Forget lockdown, the upstate New Yorker has allowed the 20 tracks gathered here and on February's *Time Waits For No One* to gestate across nine years, since 2012's *Mad Love*. As with both of their predecessors, backing comes from Galaxie 500's Dean Wareham (impressionistic electric guitar) and Spacemen 3's Sonic Boom (frazzled synths, crystalline production), each delectably colouring in around Porpora's meditative slo-mo strum and will-o'-the-wispy voice. Where *Time Waits*… darkly reflects on how *tempus fugit*, this disc's relatively breezy in transcending temporal worry. Highlights include Gillian Rivers' levitating orchestral coda to Well It's Hard, Give Me Something's instrumental echo of Dylan's *Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid*, and a sublime valedictory reading of Scots troubadour Alasdair Roberts' The Calfless Cow. Miraculously, all clocks stop for *Days Go By*.

Andrew Perry

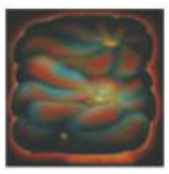
Claire Rousay

★★★★

A Softer Focus

AMERICAN DREAMS. CD/DL/LP

Canadian electronic composer and 2020 Bandcamp sensation.



Music became a means of vicarious travel in 2020. Confined to our homes it felt good to explore other environments via artists who, through their use of field recordings, ambient sound, and minimalist keyboard techniques created new landscapes to inhabit. One such musician was Texas-based Canadian composer Claire Rousay, who released nearly 10 albums to Bandcamp last year, minimalist electronics meshed with the sounds of her own domestic space, intimate iPhone notes and whispered text-to-voice prose. For this new work, a collaboration with fellow San Antonio-based artist Dani Toral and cellist Lia Kohl, Rousay attempts to capture the *sound* of close friendship. Typewriter keys tap, strings ebb and flow, cars pass by, black keys drone, friends laugh and Rousay's Auto-Tuned vocals gabble against the clink and echo of a cafe kitchen, summoning up the warm, intimate glow of a special day located somewhere in the past or up ahead in our unknown future.

Andrew Male

Comorian

★★★

We Are An Island, But We're Not Alone

GLITTERBEAT. CD/DL

Folk music from a hitherto underexploited island in the Indian Ocean.

There's an argument projects like Glitterbeat's Hidden Musics series, focusing on "highly localised sounds as opposed to globalised musical hybrids", play to the worst aspects of their Western audience, privileging dubious concepts of purity, authenticity and "raw" sounds in a way that can be rather patronising. Certainly, the backstory to this set of music from Comoros, midway between Madagascar and the African mainland, emphasises remoteness and a kind of innocence: six flights are required by the producer Ian Brennan to get there; one song is called I've Come To The City (Now My Shoes Are Repaired). The music, though, is quite lovely: nimble flights on the local equivalents to lutes and zithers, call and response vocals, an elaborate virtuosity that really does benefit from the unadorned treatment. And for all the purported avoidance of hybrids, can Mmadi, the energetic vocalist on Bandits Are Doing Bad Deeds, really have never heard James Brown?

John Mulvey

Marilena Umuhoza Delli

Treasure isle: Comorian's Mmadi and Soubi.

Marisa Anderson & William Tyler

★★★★

Lost Futures

THRILL JOCKEY. CD/DL/LP

Two fine American guitarists come together.

Mostly impervious to fashion, instrumental avant-folk continues to be a resilient and creative subculture, and one which increasingly pushes back against orthodoxies like the American Primitive tag, references to John Fahey, and the myth of guitarist as solitary musical hermit. It's a scene in which lone wolves are now revealed to be team players – hence this serendipitous match between Anderson and Tyler. The latter is no stranger to collaboration, having played key roles in Lambchop and The Silver Jews among other bands. But *Lost Futures* pits the duo's solo practices against one another, and finds common ground in the tones and twangs. The playing is dappled, unostentatious, the mood often disarmingly pretty, even when the Covid-era inspiration (the title track) is at heart melancholy. But brace yourself for the odd jolt: Something Will Come betrays a facility for grinding drone rock as well as filigreed ambience.

John Mulvey

Reigning Sound

★★★★

A Little More Time With…

MERGE. CD/DL/LP

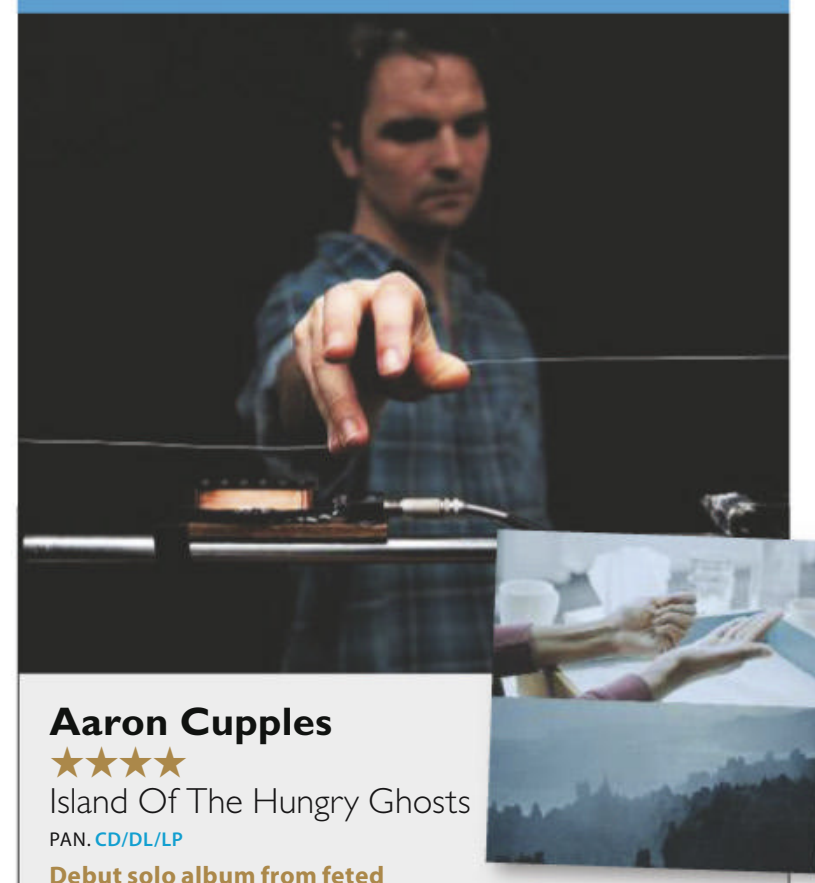
The garage-rock Dan Penn returns to Memphis

In the '90s, Greg Cartwright plied Memphis rock'n'roll with trashy no-fi attitude in Compulsive Gamblers and Oblivians. In the 2000s, his Reigning Sound's rock'n'soul was approachable, 2005's comp *Home For Orphans* dazzling with unforeseen balladry. Touring an *HFO* reissue in early 2020, he re-enlisted the backing trio responsible, who'd been replaced by Brooklynites in 2009 after a move to Asheville, NC. Once Covid hit, with New York on lockdown, his latest LP was made with the Tennessee group, in Memphis. Whether it's the homecoming or just universal pre-pandemic longings, there's an extra sparkle about this seventh Reigning Sound LP. Combining supreme craftsmanship and emotional oomph, Cartwright's songs span love-rekindling powerpop (Let's Do It Again), Big Star-y swing (Oh Christine) and pedal-steel desperation (Moving & Shaking). For all the grown-up entanglements and era-specific worries, it's championship-winning stuff.

Andrew Perry

SOUNDTRACKS

BY ANDREW MALE



Aaron Cupples

★★★★

Island Of The Hungry Ghosts

PAN. CD/DL/LP

Debut solo album from feted Australian-born producer and sound engineer.

AUSTRALIA'S Christmas Island is a place of both beauty and terror. A biologically diverse paradise, home to thousands of rare species, including a unique variety of migratory crab, it is perhaps less well known as a historical site of native exploitation and the location of Australia's high-security detention centre for asylum seekers. Gabrielle Brady's 2018 documentary seeks to capture the dichotomies of this beautiful yet horrific isle, ably assisted by Aaron Cupples' score. A producer for Spiritualized, Blanck Mass and, er, Miles Kane, Cupples knows how to turn the studio into an instrument, and while it's arguable that Leo Dolgan's eerie field recordings should have received equal billing, Cupples' richly textured blend of birdsong, ocean waves, Buddhist prayers and festival drumming with the bowed voice of an Ellen Fullman-style 13-foot-long string instrument creates a fitting blend of melody and unease throughout.

ALSO RELEASED

T. Griffin

★★★★

The Proposal

CONSTELLATION. CD/DL/LP

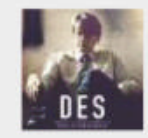
For Jill Magid's quietly disturbing film about the closely guarded archives of Mexican architect Luis Barragán, Brooklyn-based composer Griffin worked with Matana Roberts, Jim White and GSY!BE's Sophie Trudeau, utilising banjo, guitar, and electronics for his fuzzy visualisation of Barragán's hidden works, bright progressions shot through with primary colours and natural light.

Sarah Warne

★★★★

Des

SILVA SCREEN. CD/DL



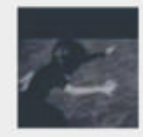
Lewis Arnold's 2020 drama about the capture and trial of UK serial killer Dennis Nilsen perfectly conjured up a muggy atmosphere of banal terror. Sarah Warne's slow-burn orchestral score does that and more, underscoring the creeping horror behind the mundanity, and emphasising the desperate loneliness of both Nilsen and his dogged pursuer, DCI Peter Jay.

Stephen Vitiello

★★★★

Soundtracks For Lynne Sachs Vols 1 & 2

BANDCAMP. DL



Musician and visual artist Vitiello has worked with experimental filmmaker Sachs since 2012, usually recording far more music than Sachs ever used. These two digital archives collect together everything created for her films. Bright, delicate patterns of guitar, synth, piano, clarinet and Rhodes keyboard convey Sachs' fascination with family, impermanence and the teeming beauty of the urban everyday.

Alberto Lucendo

★★★★

Wonderful Losers

MIDIRA. DL/LP

Filmed during the famed Giro d'Italia cycling road race, Arūnas Matelis's 2017 documentary focuses on the "domestiques", the team workers whose purpose is to assist the star cyclists. With some debts to Kraftwerk's 2003 *Tour De France Soundtracks*, Alberto Lucendo's hypnotic, pulsing score is built on race rhythms, clacking gears, the euphoria, loneliness and sheer exhaustion of the Giro. *AM*

John Grant: back to have his say.

Dayglo dreams

Expansive state of the nation address from singer-songwriter in exile. By **Victoria Segal**.

John Grant

★★★★

Boy From Michigan

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

THE FIVE-and-dime, the Tastee Freeze, tilt-a-whirls, candy and pop: at first glance, the soda fountain landscape of John Grant's fifth album wouldn't cause James Stewart much consternation. Less comforting, maybe, is the Throbbing Gristle whirr opening the album, the title track's reference to walking through a cemetery, or the friend who offers advice to the 11-year-old Grant before he moved to Colorado: "You're just a simple boy from Michigan/And they'll be doing everything they can to win/So please, please don't ever let your guard down." Then there's the ominous machine pulse of The Rusty Bull, a song about the giant metal sculpture that spanned the entrance to the scrapyard where Grant's father would hunt for car parts, its Minotaur frame later haunting his son's dreams. Suddenly, it's not such a wonderful life.

Recorded in Iceland with producer Cate Le Bon as the world started to shut down and the US elections loomed, *Boy From Michigan* maintains Grant's facility with the psychologically acute self-portrait while setting him on a wider canvas. From his island vantage point, he takes on America, not just via the filthy electro-economics of Your Portfolio or The Only Baby's dark piano satire, but also through the more subtle landscape of childhood memory and adolescent pain, the Boy From Michigan back to have his say. County Fair, almost floating away on a cloud of cotton candy synths and Thornton Wilder quaintness, is mined with poignant yearning for a better world, while Mike And Julie, a regretful love song to two friends, describes the fear and pressure of growing up gay in an intolerant small town.

There are moments of levity: the nerd-techno Best In Me lists extravagantly-named moths as a metaphor for metamorphosis, while Rhetorical Figure sees Grant gleefully putting the vice into literary device. "Epizeuxis/epizeuxis/epizeuxis," he barks, which, once you've Googled it, turns out to be a good joke. Generously, you could say it was an attack on anti-intellectualism, but it might just be a chance to show off. Given what's gone before, however – all those unsayable and unspoken things – that's its own reward. *Boy From Michigan* is Grant in panoramic mode, looking back and looking forward to create his biggest picture yet.

"I can be all over the place"

John Grant talks to **Victoria Segal**.

Why did you pick such a stark title for your new record?

"I think that's a reaction for me of having to hide for a large portion of my life – and feeling that I don't need to hide any more. I can say exactly what I think and feel so that title it feels good – I like the simplicity of it. I love Michigan and I love thinking about it – it's a really beautiful place and I romanticise it a lot. But you were being indoctrinated into this sick society. All societies are sick but I feel like the American one has some stuff up its sleeve when it comes to the sickness of the society."

What does the sculpture in The Rusty Bull mean to you?

"For a long time I couldn't find anyone who remembered that thing so you start to wonder decades on, 'Did I imagine that?'. I found a Facebook page of people who had grown up in that time in this town in Michigan and one day I remember someone asking if anyone remembers this bull in the woods off this road, and it was a really great moment for me because of course, I knew it was real. I use it as a talisman, a symbol of what I was dealing with: this thing that was growing inside of me – my sexuality, which was considered not good and evil and perverse and sick, and this thing in the woods was looking at me and saying, 'We have all sorts of horrible things in store for you.' It's sort of a metaphor for coming of age and dealing with being a gay man in small-town America back in those days."

Was there music that was particularly important to you during recording?

"We thought a lot about Chris & Cosey – I'm always thinking about Chris & Cosey. I was thinking about Jean-Michel Jarre and specifically his album *ZooLook* from 1986. Vangelis, Blade Runner and Talk Talk because that album *The Colour Of Spring* was so huge to me. Devo came up quite a bit because I'm always thinking about Devo as well. I quickly homed in on the sound that I wanted. A lot of the songs started on piano, but I had a lot of beautiful little soundscapes that I had made on my synths in my studio. One of the things Cate did was to help focus the sound and bring it some cohesiveness because I can be all over the place. We talked about saxophone a lot because we both love saxophone, and clarinet. Like that sax solo on Baker Street by Gerry Rafferty, that's one of my favourite things."

Gary Numan

★★★★

Intruder

BMG. CD/DL/LP

Nineteenth solo album from synthpop's official National Treasure.

For over two decades Gary Numan has written less as a pop star and much more as a sound sculptor – a master at layering dense sound but sometimes at the expense of a pay-off hook. *Intruder* carries with it the same dark-waved filmic density as his previous album, *Savage (Songs From A Broken World)*, and the themes explored – the futility of religion, the evil of humankind's ecological warfare against the planet – are similarly cheerless. But what we get more of are melodies that stick. The title track – all soaring synths – is a reminder of the *Pleasure Principle* era; The Gift is astonishing, melding old school drum machine rhythms with an explosive dark wave sound built on Middle Eastern-inspired melodic contours. And the keyboard on A Black Sun and The End Of Dragons cuts through the heavier sound texture and reminds us just what a lovely melodicist Numan can be.

David Buckley

Kele Okereke

★★★

The Waves Pt.I

KOLA. DL

Bloc Party frontman's fifth solo album, a loopy lockdown missive.

Okereke's last album *2042* was also self-made, but enforced social isolation has triggered a fresh response, replacing former indie rock, dance and folk tropes with a bedrock of loops and no anchoring drums/beats. *The Waves Pt 1*'s ebb-and-flow is closer to Philip Glass's pulsing minimalism than anything calming or restorative; even the backdrop to spoken-word meditation Intention ignores its own advice. And when Okereke pens an instrumental ode to a beach scene, it's the bleak shingle outpost of Dungeness. There are strong songs too, like They Didn't See It Coming, striking notes of paranoia and anger, but an unexpected cover of Bronski Beat's gay anthem Smalltown Boy is gentler. It's a story of surviving against the odds, which might be how Okereke conceived *The Waves* as a whole.

Martin Aston

Loscil

★★★★

Clara

KRANKY. CD/DL/LP

Vancouver ambient artist's cut-up symphony for Budapest strings.

There's a neat backstory to the latest album by Scott Morgan, who's been making somewhat undervalued, ambient-leaning electronica for a couple of decades now, as well as spending time as drummer for Dan Bejar's Destroyer. For *Clara*, Morgan composed a three-minute piece then a) had it performed by a Budapest string orchestra; b) got the performance cut on a 7-inch; c) "scratched and abused" the 7-inch; d) sampled and mixed it into a 77-minute album. After all this, *Clara* is neither ostentatiously glitchy, nor overburdened by its conceptual heft. Instead, the slow-moving symphonics are processed through clouds of aesthetically refined digitalia; Aura, in particular, has a stately grace and discreet emotional intensity. The divisions between the 10 tracks feel mostly irrelevant in the face of *Clara*'s overall grandeur: Tim Hecker, or the 2007 version of Gavin Bryars' Sinking Of The Titanic, by turntablist Philip Jeck, might not be the worst comparisons.

John Mulvey

Suleika Müller

Greentea Peng: eats 'shrooms and parties hard.

Rostam

★★★★

Changephobia

MATSOR. CD/DL/LP

Vampire Weekend alumnus steps fully into solo spotlight.

Since leaving his day band in 2016 – whose first three albums he produced – Rostam Batmanglij has whizzed around utilising his multi-instrumentalist and studio skills, working with Haim and Hamilton Leithauser and releasing a solo album, *Half-Light*, in 2017. But while that record stuck to familiar indie or country roads (with diversions into chamber pop or Indian music), here on its follow-up his sound coalesces into atmospheric soul jazz. His lovely semi-detached vocals are pitched somewhere between Paul Simon and John Martyn, particularly the latter amid the artful, dislocated beats and dusty saxophones of late-night tale Unfold You. Filtered drums fade in and out of the mix of These Kids We Knew, and From The Back Of A Cab ("To the airport") could be a short story detailing a happy, unexpected hour spent with someone close. Sustaining a dreamworld mood throughout, *Changephobia* is a quiet beauty.

Tom Doyle

Greentea Peng

★★★★

Man Made

AMF/EMI. CD/DL/LP

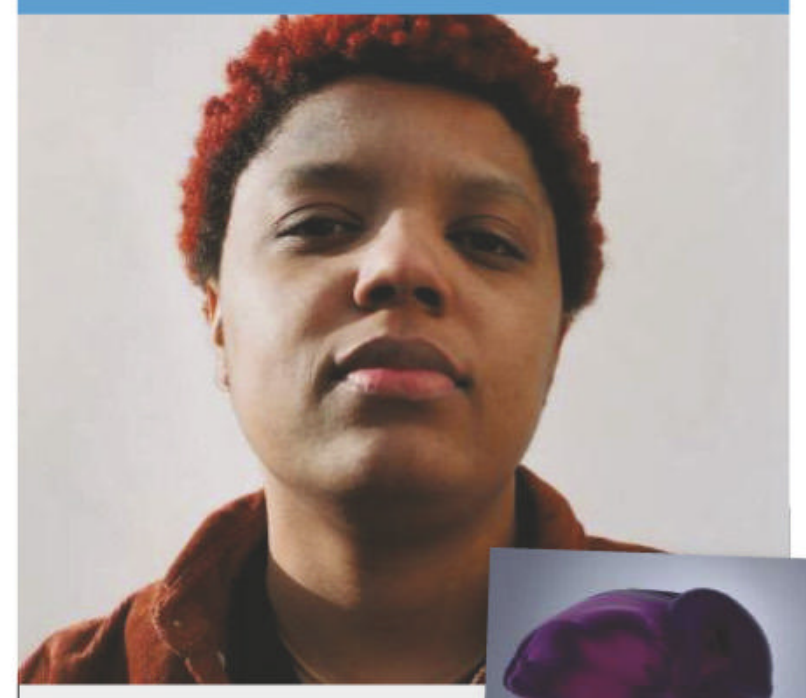
Soul-funk psychedelicist's debut is a dubbed-out early-summer treat.

While her appearance on Later… last year suggested merely another Amy Winehouse acolyte, this debut from Bermondsey polymath Greentea Peng showcases an artist of depth and complexity. From within the dubby heat-haze encasing *Man Made*, Peng ponders the physical and the metaphysical (This Sound), calls for the release of "all my brothers on a weed charge" (Free My People) and, on Party Hard, argues emphatically that all within earshot should "eat some fuckin' 'shrooms!". Such exhortations are soundtracked by languid funk that occasionally stumbles into trip-hop autopilot but is mostly electrified by Peng's restless inspiration, from wiring Nah It Ain't The Same with offbeat piano and bristling drum'n'bass breaks, to saturating Maya with delirious Ernie Isley-esque guitar licks. Her fusion of Erykah Badu's maverick mysticism with Sade's poised eroticism, meanwhile, conjures a forthright and self-possessed voice we're sure to hear more of.

Stevie Chick

ELECTRONICA

BY STEPHEN WORTHY



Loraine James

★★★★★

Reflection

HYPERDUB. CD/DL/LP

Genre-bending digital confessionals that balance truth with hope.

AROUND THE release of her visceral 2019 debut, *For You And I*, Enfield's Loraine James highlighted a need – as a young, black, queer woman – for a "safe space". Then came the pandemic. *Reflection* became an exercise in contemplation, recorded in lockdown, that is both brutally honest and beautifully hopeful. An endlessly inventive album, it sets a noteworthy template for modern British electronic music. It's a succession of counterpoints. On Black Ting, longtime collaborator Le3 bLACK spits grime rhymes over a roaring bass reverb, gunshot percussion and balmy techno. In contrast, Running Like That strides confidently into Jessy Lanza-style alt-R&B, a glorious amalgam of pillowy synth pads, hyperactive beats and Eden Samara's breathy vocals. From experimental to twisted pop, drill to R&B, techno to ambient, James draws a precise and brilliant musical Venn diagram.

ALSO RELEASED

Jas Shaw

★★★★

Sollbruchstelle I-III

THIS IS MUSIC. DL/LP

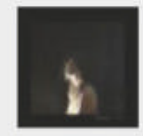
We have all had to endure isolation during this past year, but few have done so quite like Jas Shaw. While recovering from stem cell treatment last year, he had to lock himself away from his family in the barn studio adjoining their Kent home. The end result is this sparkling, moving and meditative long-player of muted ambient electronics and shimmering drone.

Penelope Trappes

★★★★

Penelope Three

HOUNDSTOOTH. CD/DL/LP



The final part of Penelope Trappes' extraordinary aural triptych is one of love, spirituality and healing after previous explorations of birth and rebirth, grief and loss. Darkly gothic in feel – recalling her fellow Brighton-based Australian artist Nick Cave – it moves sedately and seductively, a brooding mass of reverb, drone and throb, all counter-pointed by Trappes' gossamer-light vocals.

Maxwell Sterling

★★★

Turn Of Phrase

AD 93. DL/LP

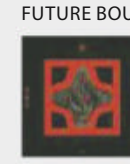
By subverting accepted notions of rhythm and time in western music here, Maxwell Sterling challenges convention and unsettles the listener. Scion of punk chronicler and artist Linder Sterling and writer Michael Bracewell, Sterling Jr envelops you in a blanket of skewed beats, Gregorian chants and wonky, abrasive strings, evoking the darkly cinematic approach of Oneohtrix Point Never.

Lorenzo BITW

★★★★

Pantea

FUTURE BOUNCE. DL/LP



There are shades of the effervescent energy radiating from DJ Python's acclaimed ambient/reggaeton hybrid in the sound that Lorenzo BITW forges. The Italian producer celebrates his homeland's growing multi-culturalism with *Pantea*, deftly knitting together West African rhythms, sub-Saharan instrumentation and modern dance music tropes. The results are a smile-inducing series of musical explosions. *SW*

The Catenary Wires

★★★★

Birling Gap

SKEP WAX. CD/DL/LP

A portrait of Britain in turbulent times.

On this third album, Amelia Fletcher and Rob Pursey explore the complexities of what it means to be English in a post-Brexit/Covid landscape where cosy nostalgia is filtered through societal anxiety and the realisation that we're all growing up and growing old. As usual, the pair's songs tap into the bittersweet pop melodies and duetting harmonies of their previous bands – Talulah Gosh, Heavenly, Tender Trap – but now expanded to a five-piece with Fay Hallam, Ian Button and Andy Lewis recruited from their live band. Their magnetic sound is consequently richer now and embellished with muted horns and warm Hammond flurries. Kinksian vignettes capture the various moods of the nation; idealistic (Canterbury Lanes), romantic (Mirrorball), xenophobic (Cinematic), arrogant (Three-Wheeled Car). Intelligent, thoughtful, beautifully realised and produced – by Andy Lewis – this is quite possibly the best thing Fletcher and Pursey have done to date.

Lois Wilson

Erland Cooper

★★★★

Holm

PHASES. CD/DL/LP

B-sides and guest artist reworkings of tracks from the troubadour's last three LPs.

Erland Cooper's 'Orkney Triptych' of albums – 2018's *Solan Goose*, 2019's *Sule Skerry* and last year's *Hether Blether* – are dreamily mellifluous, capacious instrumental ruminations on childhood memory and his home archipelago. Sublime personal evocations they may be, but as much of *Holm* attests, the nostalgic, poignant pull at the centre of Cooper's compositions speaks to a more universal emotional truth. Whether introspective piano étude (Hayden Thorpe's delicate take on Malliemack; Alexis Kozobolis's reverie-like In Dwarfie Stone), ambient dreamscape (Bill Ryder-Jones's string-laden Haar Over Hamnavoe, Marta Salogni's Harold Budd-like reimagining of Haar Over Stenness) or poignant folk air (Daniel Pioro's St. Magnus Of Hamnavoe), a sense of contemplative wonder pervades the reworkings. Cooper's own essays, like the achingly wistful Maalie Over Marwick Head, are hardly cutting room floor detritus, and would have slotted in comfortably on any of his recent long-players.

David Sheppard

Grave Flowers Bongo Band

★★★★

Strength Of Spring

CASTLE FACE. CD/DL/LP

Psych-folk Angelenos conjure heavy nuggets, produced by Ty Segall.

On 2018's *Flower Pot*, this LA combo seemed aptly christened after their acoustic-rattling leader Gabe Flores (well, almost) and the wonky hand percussion galloping at his hind. Three years on, this second album finds GFBB substantially beefed up, from a trio to a five-piece, complete with propulsive, prog-minded rhythm section and incense-torching electric guitar. Lazy River opens with an intricate West Coast folk rock jam, before Sleepy Eyes lifts off sunwards with thunderous riffing, screeching soloing and Stoogean sax all evoking the year 1969 plus Castle Face label boss John Dwyer's Osees at their most concise. As well as sonic attack, Flores also emphatically ticks the psych-pop melody box, on Dinosaur Jr.-esque pedal-hopper Tomorrow, and Venus, whose over-amped Beatles vibe welcomely recalls raw'n'alive helmsman Ty Segall. All told, *Strength Of Spring* delivers a full-tab summer psychedelic rave-up for fans of *Led Zeppelin III*, *Brown Acid* comps, and, yes, Osees.

Andrew Perry

Kasai Allstars

★★★

Black Ants Always Fly Together, One Bangle Makes No Sound

CRAMMED DISCS. CD/DL/LP

Fourth outing from the Congotronics veterans.

That burst of creativity unleashed in Kinshasa 15 years ago may have faded in the memory, through musical differences and various human frailties, but the Allstars battle on, original members to the fore and taking a greater role in forging their sound. Now produced by guitarist Mopero Mupemba – always the most sussed of the Congotronics crew – the gigantic lokombe (slit drum) and buzz drums no longer shock in the way they used to, although the synths suggest one route forward, and the guitars and harmonies look to South Africa for inspiration. Yet, when those distorted thumb pianos are turned up to 11 or more – on Musungu Elongo Paints His Face White To Scare Small Children, for example – it's hard not to get that old rush, that feeling that somebody is bouncing a basketball at top speed off the inside of your skull.

David Hutcheon

Lord Huron

★★★★

Long Lost

POLYDOR. CD/DL/LP/MC

Arch Michigan pop-folkies' fourth album.

In 2018, *Vide Noir* went Top 10 in the US and after almost a decade at the coalface, Lord Huron are suddenly big news. On this fourth LP, they've submerged the songs in an incoherent concept involving an imaginary studio chief of their real studio, but the music – a little Lumineers, a little Fleet Foxes – stands up for itself. Aside from Time's Blur, the closing 14-minute instrumental slab of ambience, and the spooked Twin Peaksy Drops In The Lake, they're catchy and elegiac, so on Mine Forever the timeless Hank Marvin twang snuggles up alongside Ben Schneider's warm voice. Love Me Like You Used To ("I dream most every night that I never left you") is a heartbroken earworm and when song of exile Twenty Long Years ends, it immediately starts up again with a woozy choir and all's well with the world.

John Aizlewood

Micky Dolenz

★★★★

Dolenz Sings Nesmith

7A. CD/DL/LP

Monkees singer/drummer covers cohort's back pages on first solo LP in nine years.

The template was Harry Nilsson's *Nilsson Sings Newman*; Micky Dolenz taking his erstwhile bandmate and pal Mike Nesmith's songs from The Monkees, National Band and solo period and doffing his cap in a jaunty fashion. The results are endearing and generous, with many highpoints such as reimaginings of Different Drum and Circle Sky. The former becomes an attractive burst of pop, proving that whoever told Nesmith the song wasn't suitable Monkees material didn't know what they were talking about; the latter is reworked as a mesmeric raga reminding us how subversive The Monkees could be. Don't Wait For Me provides another stirring moment – the first recording originally taken from Nez's 1968 sessions with Nashville musicians shifted to the Appalachian mountains with acoustic guitar and Dolenz singing how much he cares.

Lois Wilson

Johanna Samuels

★★★★

Excelsior!

BASIN ROCK. CD/DL/LP

Debut from East and West Coaster, who's named after a Dylan song.

CHRISTENED after Bob Dylan's Visions Of Johanna, Johanna Samuels was born in New York, grew up in Los Angeles, returned home as an 18-year-old, before settling down in LA a decade later. Recorded (inevitably) in upstate New York, *Excelsior!* heralds a subtle talent, akin to Hannah Cohen and Courtney Marie Andrews, both of whom guest on backing vocals. Samuels treads softly with the insistent but understated melodies of Song For Sid and the humming, Weyes Blood-like Sonny. However, on the stand-out The Middle (yes, it's in the middle of the album), Less Of You and Cathy, Samuels packs an emotional punch. Lyrically she's as ruminative as the *XO*-era Elliott Smith, but when she declares, "You come around to kiss my ass, but I don't need more work to do," on High Tide For One, she's clearly not to be under-estimated.

John Aizlewood

It's a dog's life: Johanna Samuels and scene-stealing canine friend.

Les Filles De Illighadad

★★★★

At Pioneer Works

SAHEL SOUNDS. CD/DL/LP

The third wave of Tuareg blues, recorded live in Brooklyn.

Led by Fatou Seidi Ghali, Les Filles are not your standard Tuareg rock band, and the fact they consider themselves folk musicians may indicate a reluctance on the part of the three women at the core of the group to align themselves too closely with male-dominated peers such as Tinariwen. Yet, if their use of traditional percussion (the tende drum), chants and rhythms sets them apart in the eyes and ears of their audience in Niger, this distinction is unlikely to bother curious outsiders. Instead, we can focus on their insistent beat and the ragged interplay between the guitarists that is seriously (Warhol-era) Velvet Underground-like in its sting. Though, as the pounding Irriganan proves, they don't need axes to rock'n'roll. Those old Saharan blues may possess an abundance of secrets yet to be revealed.

David Hutcheon

Earl Slick

★★★

Fist Full Of Devils

SCHNITZEL. CD/DL/LP

Acclaimed sessioneer's all-instrumental first solo album since 2003.

When David Bowie decided both that his own studio guitar work on *Diamond Dogs* wasn't up to Mick Ronson's standard and that his live band needed a dynamic guitarist, he settled on New Yorker Earl Slick, who would become an on-off presence until *The Next Day*. Slick would also feature on John Lennon & Yoko Ono's *Double Fantasy* and have a blink-and-you'll-miss-it stint as a touring New York Doll in 2011. His solo career, though, never took hold, despite 2003's *Zig Zag* featuring Bowie, Robert Smith and Joe Elliott. There's no such lurch towards commerciality on *Fist Full Of Devils*, but it's a handsome showcase for Slick's densely textured, blues-tinged work. It's at its best on the rampaging J.W.L. (see also the closing Dr Winston O'Boogie) where Slick cranks out stentorian riffs against thunderous keyboards, while the gentler Lost shows Slick can be slick too.

John Aizlewood

Mammoth WVH

★★★★

Mammoth WVH

EX1. CD/DL/LP

Eddie Van Halen's son Wolfgang proves that it's in the blood.

Part-named after Mozart and already a touring member of late-period Van Halen by the age of 16, Wolfgang Van Halen was always primed to shine. The video for his debut single Distance, a tribute to his late father drawing upon touching home-movie footage, has clocked 4.7 million YouTube views, and now comes this audacious debut, a deeply melodic hard rock/grunge album with shades of Stone Temple Pilots, Pearl Jam and early Foo Fighters. A small marvel of musical autonomy, it sees Wolf playing and singing every note, his formidable chops across bass, drums and rip-roaring guitar elevating standouts You're To Blame, Don't Back Down and You'll Be The One. Though the name Mammoth – Van Halen's moniker before they were VH – is a talismanic nod to his father, Wolf has established his own distinct and mighty voice.

James McNair

Alvaro López,

Les Filles De Illighadad reveal Saharan secrets.

Mdou Moctar

★★★★

Afrique Victime

MATADOR. CD/DL/LP

Niger desert rock giants' first for Matador hits suitably transcendent form.

If it was a Wishbone Ash album, it would be *Argus*. If it was Television, it would be *Marquee Moon*. Aficionados of twin guitar attack from time immemorial will find something familiar and also something new to love in the latest interactions of Tuareg bandleader Moctar and his dextrous six-string helpmeet Ahmoudou Madassane. From the gentle breeze of the Tala Tannam to the howling gale of lead single Chismiten, the little clumps of ambient sound – village chatter, footsteps, maybe a cockerel – hold their ground against every new gust of virtuoso fretwork. And the amazing seven-and-a-half-minute title track starts out as a lament and finishes as a battle hymn – it might be Led Zeppelin's Immigrant Song in reverse. Either way, the solo around the five-minute mark is a new high-water mark for the influence of Eddie Van Halen on African music.

Ben Thompson

Rural Tapes

★★★★

Rural Tapes

SMUGGLER MUSIC. DL/LP

Krautrock, jazz and classical collide on Norwegian producer's wistful debut.

Happy to dodge the limelight as a member of I Was A King and The No Ones (alongside R.E.M.'s Peter Buck and Scott McCaughey), sometime film composer Arne Kjelsrud Mathisen has discovered his voice as Rural Tapes. Recorded in dispatches after relocating to the countryside, a sense of freeness abounds on Reddal, a shape-shifting mini-symphony whose low, slow drone and motorik groove are unexpectedly hijacked by gnat-like synths and Terry Edwards' querulous blasts of saxophone. Other guests supply critical detail – Alexis Taylor's tender, psychedelic Rhodes piano enhancing Pardon My French's low-slung Breton-cool, while McCaughey's elliptical lyrics misshape the dreamy Lost In Sound – yet it is Mathisen's ingenious way with a Clavier and willingness to gently wig-out that elevates this offbeat, moving hybrid of Air, Tortoise, Serge Gainsbourg and Kraftwerk to a level of its very own.

Andy Cowan

JAZZ

BY ANDY COWAN

Dougie Stu

★★★★

Familiar Future

ROPEADOPE/HEAVENLY. CD/DL/LP

Worlds combine on Chicago multi-instrumentalist's chilled spiritual jazz odyssey.

ALUMNUS OF the University of Michigan's jazz programme, Doug Stuart is a man of many faculties. After dabbling in psychedelic pop-soul with Bells Atlas, dark folk with Suzanne Vallie and future disco with Brijean (alongside partner Brijean Murphy), his debut is a sharp swerve into a hyperreal spiritual jazz, tumbling in elements of hip-hop and R&B. Whether it's the epic sweep of Wind Chaser (set alive by Marcus Stephens' questing flute), spiralling strings of Joyride or the title track's lush ensemble feel, *Familiar Future* plays like a happy marriage of Alice Coltrane's tranquil introspection and Lonnie Liston Smith's ethereal grooves. Augmented by Maya Kronfeld's shimmering Fender Rhodes, Jeff Parker's pitch-perfect guitars and Tito Puente veteran John Santos's textured percussion, it's the best of both worlds: forward-facing yet unafraid to show its deep roots.

ALSO RELEASED

Richard X Bennett

★★★★

RXB3

UBUNTU. CD/DL/LP

Evolving improvised melodies from bespoke patterns, the Indian raga-loving Bennett is a gifted pianist and graceful melodist, with subtle shades of Dave Grusin. Whether rolling up his sleeves on the jaunty Made From Stone, rejigging the blues on The Reckoning or tackling Bollywood standard Tum Hi Ho, the danceable quirkiness of his compositions – locked in by bassist Adam Armstrong and drummer Julian Edmond – rarely obscures their depth or poise.

Vijay Iyer

★★★★

Uneasy

ECM. CD/LP

Among jazz's most searching performers, *Uneasy* is an apt description of the self-taught pianist Vijay Iyer's restless nature. Paired here with bassist Linda May Han Oh and long-time drummer Tyshawn Sorey, it's packed tight with wayward ideas, be it sprinting through Cole Porter's Night And Day or jollifying 2001's rhythmic tempo experiment Configurations. Switching from delicate to muscular in a stroke, its tense, disturbed title track wins out.

Leni Stern

★★★★

Dance

LENI STERN. DL/LP

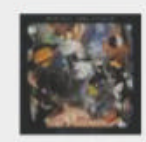
A veteran of Salif Keita's band, *Dance* trades off Stern's seamless mix of jazz and West African styles. While there's a real-time physicality to Mamadou Ba's interlocking bass, Eladji Alioune's tumbling percussion and Leo Genovese's swerving synths that suggests they could ride these patterns for hours, it's Stern's top-line guitar and expressive voice that brings their rhythmic jazz-funk into unerring focus.

Rebecca Vasmant

★★★

With Love, From Glasgow

REBECCA'S. DL/LP



Another outlet from the Clyde's free-flowing scene, DJ/producer and composer Rebecca Vasmant adds subtle dance smarts to the mix on this uplifting work with The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra. A kinetic set that runs the gamut mood-wise, it excels on star turns from Pharoah Sanders tenor sax disciple Harry Weir (Jewels Of Thought) and spoken word poet Paix (Internal Dispute). *AC*

FILTER ALBUMS EXTRA

Turner Cody And The Soldiers Of Love

★★★★

Friends In High Places

CAPITANE. CD/DL/LP

Cody channels Hank Williams and Waylon Jennings' lovesick country blues, soaked in whiskey and regret. Shades of Dire Straits, Booker T. and Eugene Chadbourne blur the lines 'twixt light and dark. *AC*

Jess Cornelius

★★★★

Distance

LOANTAKA. DL/LP

Bittersweet highlight Body Memory recounts the heartbreak of miscarriage: gritty emotional territory that Cornelius surveys with her potent vocals – part Chrissie Hynde, part Angel Olsen. Whistling fellow Australian Molly Lewis and US harpist Mary Lattimore guest. *JB*

Enji

★★★

Ursgal

SQUAMA RECORDINGS. DL/LP

This Mongolian folk singer relocated to Munich to pursue a love of jazz, recording her second LP with German producer Martin Brugger. Expressive originals – like Ella Fitzgerald singing in Khalkha – sit comfortably alongside a cappella standard I'm Glad There Is You. *JB*

Exum

★★★

Cardinal Coffee

ÜCKE. LP/DL

The outré style Antone Exum Jr embodied with the SF 49ers continues on the ex-NFL footballer's giddy debut. Veering from emotive '80s pop-rap to lysergic digression, his flow-switching cook-up of slick hip-hop, skewed pop and wonky R&B rivals Blood Orange for adventurism. *AC*

Go Go Penguin

★★★★

GGP/RMX

BLUE NOTE. CD/DL/LP

Mancunian piano-drum-bass band's fifth album surrenders to electronic remixers. While Machinedrum's arpeggios and 808 State's shimmering skills keep the tempo feverish, Clark and Squarepusher's more radical deconstructions expose deeper enigmas at play in GGP's source material. *AC*

I See Islands

★★★★

Within A Lightbeam

TRIASSIC TUSK. LP

From the Highland town of Mallaig, Seamus Joseph O'Donnell's enchanting debut features synth gyrations, hazy melodies and a voice like Mark Linkous; the narcotised drift of I'll Just Party especially draws us to the hypnotic strangeness below the song's surface. *JB*

Scott Matthews

★★★

New Skin

SHEDIO. CD/DL/LP

Ex-stargazing folkie, Matthews' new direction is electronic. Being Eno'd suits him: digital beats and pulses palpitate gently through the title track, softening his more epic, singer-songwriter instincts on the War On Drugs-like Anniversary or Our Time. *JB*

Mind Maintenance

★★★

Mind Maintenance

DRAG CITY. CD DL LP

Chicago jazz mainstays Josh Abrams and Chad Taylor swap bass and drums for guimbri (a sub-Saharan lute) and mbira (southern African thumb piano), their jams suggesting gamelan and Don Cherry's Organic Music Society. *JM*

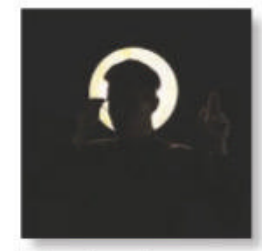
The Near Jazz Experience

★★★★

Nought To 60

SARTORIAL. DL/LP

Higsons' Terry Edwards and Simon Charterton plus Mark Bedford (Madness), NJE fire curveballs over deep grooves. Spirit Of Indo and Tizitia see Edwards at his multi-sax best, while the kosmische title track drips discord and danger. *AC*



Sorbet

★★★★

This Was Paradise

BUREAU B. CD/DL/LP

Bridging classical, alt-pop, jazz and electronica, this set from Chris W Ryan bristles with unease. Its well-chosen collaborations (Arborist; Maija Sofia), musical nods (Eno, Russell, Talk Talk) and dark ruminations on climate change necessitate active listening. *AC*

EXTENDED PLAY

American Music Club, 1987: (from left) Mark Eitzel, Dan Pearson, Tom Mallon, Vudi.

AMC

Unavailable for years in physical form, and previously absent from streaming services, it's a real joy to discover that the first four albums by the perennially underestimated **American Music Club** have just landed on Bandcamp. Mostly, these early recordings made between 1985 and 1989 sound as great as ever: the productions are unfussy and timeless; the sound, while containing kernels of the slowcore and Americana movements to come, still feels wholly idiosyncratic, thanks to the way Mark Eitzel's emotional currents seem to steer his band to empathetic, unexpected places. Debut *The Restless Stranger* (1985) is sketchy, but has aged better than its poor reputation suggests; 1987's *Engine* is raggedy and fraught, unsteady on its feet, pretty great. Newcomers, though, are advised to grab *California* (1988) and *United Kingdom* (1989) first, to hear Eitzel's poetic frankness and his band's impressionistic, stealthy gift for drama in perfect sync. Eitzel and AMC would make more excellent records, but perhaps they never bettered these two. *JM*

Sunroof

★★★★

Electronic Music Improvisations Vol. 1

MUTE. CD/DL/LP

Mute boss Daniel Miller and producer Gareth Jones team up for eight modulated synth pieces. Scintillating electronics that line-up nicely with the space pulsations of Terry Riley, Cluster, or (coincidence?) Matthew Bower's Sunroof! *JB*

Trees Speak

★★★★

PostHuman

SOUL JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

Tucson brothers' vintage synth explorations continue on sci-fi concept. Humanity's end sounds grim; but beautifully rendered, via the stern rhythms and textures of Krautrock, plus liberal recourse to the uncanny harmonics of '70s horror soundtracks. *JB*

Greg Allen

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Kosmische Psychos

The first restored volume in a new live album series, the four-piece **Can** chase ecstasy, Godzillas and random harmony. By **Ian Harrison**.

Can

★★★★

Live In Stuttgart 1975

MUTE/SPOON. CD/DL/LP

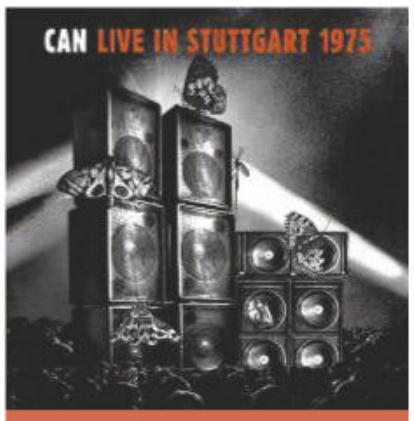
CAN HAD bad luck recording their gigs. The soundtrack to the Can Free Concert movie filmed at the Sporthalle in their hometown of Cologne in February 1972, for example, required redubbing at their Inner Space studio when the 4-track recorder only picked up bass, voice and drums. In August '73, an attempt to cut a live LP at the Edinburgh Festival – their last gig with vocalist Damo Suzuki – was abandoned when the guitar was mysteriously absent from the tape.

Was this audio blockage something to do with their kind of potent magic, improvised live and in the moment by players psychically attuned to one another? Their 1974 track Quantum Physics looked to the atomic and sub-atomic world, where the behaviour of particles is affected when they are observed: was Can's moment of fusion impossible to capture when they were consciously trying to document it? Significantly, they didn't record this release's performance in Stuttgart on October 31, 1975, but someone else did (the label is coy about who).

Now, with digital techniques sharpening up the non-pro original tape, we have a restored, pain-free and easily enjoyed document of that night. A 90-minute immersive experience, separated into five numerically titled pieces, it lets the armchair chrononaut attune to a lengthy Can performance in all its shifts and drama without mitigation (remember, classics including *Monster Movie* and *Tago Mago* were improvised recordings edited, spliced and rebuilt). It finds them at a critical juncture, still without a singer after the departure of Damo, having just released the accessible, slickly produced *Landed* album. Recorded during three weeks of German dates, this night in Stuttgart would be the scene of heightened creation and startling intersections of audience vibration, group connectivity and concrete action and sounds more akin to free early Can than the studio LPs they made in their remaining lifetime.

Listening brought to mind something Can keyboardist and conductor Irmin Schmidt told this writer a decade ago in the studio at Les Rossignols, his rural nerve centre in south-east France. "What fascinates me for over 40 years are swarms of birds and of fishes," he said. "These creatures being one dense thing and, all of a sudden, expanding and all these movements… I could watch them for hours if I had the chance."

The concept of murmuration – of spontaneous order emerging from multiple autonomous minds, moving in beauteous random harmony – is as good a comparison as any when investigating the Can live experience. Opening piece Eins begins with gothic keyboard tones from the conservatory, generated via Schmidt's custom-built Alpha 77 effects box. Metal strings vibrate as the beast awakens: drummer Jaki Liebezeit begins to beat a stripped, hyper-regular funk pattern with an echo of breakdancers' fave Vitamin C, guitarist Michael Karoli chicken scratches and moans while steady pulse Holger Czukay keeps it thrillingly monotonous on the bass. Close listening is rewarded, and sparks include Karoli reaching back to his Romanian roots around 16:40, followed up by a cowbell attack by Liebezeit that recalls The M.G.'s' Soul Limbo at 17:36. Soon after, as musical planes intersect, there's a slight rhythmic stumble, after which Jaki redoubles his efforts and we're conveyed to the kind of wailing, cataclysmic peak the group dubbed a 'Godzilla'. Each member is the main player in their own sphere, while remaining part of the whole.



"We're conveyed to a cataclysmic peak the group dubbed a 'Godzilla'."

Schmidt said they could do what they did because they all knew that the first few bars of a piece defined the rule for the rest of it. The players would then follow it, balancing discipline and expanding the idea as wide and free as it would go. Muscle-memory impressions of established Can works are part of this. The shuffling Zwei has traces of *Tago Mago*'s Oh Yeah, as it winds, levitates and burns itself out in a maelstrom of hard-grooving psych of cosmic dimensions. From the same mulch as Vernal Equinox from that year's *Landed*, the 36-minute Drei is a trip in itself: a snake-dancing breakbeat monorail is erased down until Mother Sky-like drums and bass resurge, before giving way to a kind of chamber music. At the halfway mark, a process of descent and demolition begins, ending with the song-as-living-organism's convincing, and oddly martial, death throes. Vier brings a lyrical kind of disco rock, echoes of *Soon Over Babaluma*'s Dizzy Dizzy and an embrace of churning noise and chaos, while the strutting Fünf is an exercise in evolving tension which takes the group back to their film music incarnation, in this case for a psychological horror story with batty organ and another kitchen sink-throwing Godzilla.

Remarkably, Schmidt told MOJO that while he thinks the four-piece line-up were at their live zenith, he doesn't regard this as a particularly exceptional performance (you could have fooled this listener). It's curious, too, to reflect that the group were entering the final stage of their existence. Within the year, Traffic's Rosko Gee took on Czukay's bass role, and by June '77 Can had played their last gig. Additionally, the keyboardist noted that they improvised less as 1975 turned into '76 and started playing recognisable pieces. Yet, rather than a goodbye to Can in their telepathic prime, *Stuttgart 1975* seems more part of an unending and still unended conversation. Other official live documents in the Can Live Series will no doubt take it further: perhaps the restorers will resurrect tapes of the mythologised show at the Roman theatre in Arles in August 1975, where Schmidt felt the "glücksgefühl", or ecstasy, descending. Maybe *Prehistoric Future*, the Can Ur-text from June '68, will get an audio polish, adding to a storehouse of music with all gates open, in flow motion, which remains grippingly alive.

"I think there was a certain euphoric feeling in all of us to go on stage and play something to the people," Schmidt mused in Les Rossignols. "We liked that joy… You intend maybe, but you don't say while doing something, 'Should be fresh in 40 years.' You just do your fucking best. You do it with the conscious that there should be something which holds. That's all."

BACK STORY: HUNTERS AND COLLECTORS

● The tapes for the new Can Live Series are from bootlegs, many from the collection of Andrew Hall, a privileged Can taper who began recording them in 1973. Early forays involved him hiding then-large size Sony cassette recorders inside 36-inch waist trousers (he was a 28-inch waist) and wearing a large duffle coat with a microphone down each sleeve, regardless of venue heat. In 1975 he was invited to tape at the mixing desk. *Stuttgart 1975* was compiled and edited by Schmidt and longtime Can engineer René Tinner and mastered by Andreas Torkler and Dieter Denzer of Music Base Studio, Bielefeld, whose restorations can also be heard on Can's *The Lost Tapes*.

"Should be fresh in 40 years": Can, at work in Inner Space, Weilerswist, mid '70s (clockwise from left) Holger Czukay; Michael Karoli; Irmin Schmidt; Can on-stage; Jaki Liebezeit.

Big Big Train

★★★★

The Underfall Yard

ENGLISH ELECTRIC. CD/DL/LP

2009 LP from cult UK prog band returns with additional new or re-recorded music.

Opuses don't come more magnum than the title track of Big Big Train's *The Underfall Yard*, a grand sweep of mellotron, guitars, synths and bass, not to mention glockenspiel and tuba, hymning the engineering achievements of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The album is meandering, episodic and, for lovers of modern progressive rock, quite outstanding. You'll hear it on the first CD here, which is the original album very gently remixed. And you will hear it again on CD2, re-recorded by the 2020 line-up. The crucial improvement is the replacement of two frenetic guest solos by contributions from the band that sit better within the piece. CD 2 is a reimagining of the album with songs reordered, a new brass prelude and a new, pretty acoustic song, Brew And Burgh, that's a pastoral contrast to the pyro-technics of the title track. Not exactly a vital replacement, but a great prog album just got a little greater.

John Bungey

Nina Simone

★★★★

The Montreux Years

BMG. CD/DL

The High Priestess of soul, captured in one place but not at one time.

Sited on the eastern shore of Lake Geneva, Montreux has been a magnet for musicians for decades, and Claude Nobs' jazz festival had many artists on repeat dial. Here, excerpts from Nina Simone's several visits (1976, 1981, 1987 and 1990) are harvested along with another 13 songs from her terrific performance on June 16, 1968, the festival's second year. Simone's voice is still young but already rich in experience and understanding as she moves from a feisty Go To Hell through the tuneful standard Just In Time into When I Was A Young Girl, the traditional ballad familiar as One Morning In May that follows a young woman's journey "out of the alehouse and into the jail-house". Two Bee Gees covers, To Love Somebody and lesser-known Please Read Me, done as a sort of chamber piece, and unexpectedly uptempo versions of House Of The Rising Sun and Gin House Blues, are some of the surprises and delights. (NB: Parts of the concert were released as long ago as 1972 as *Live In Europe*.) A less satisfying *The Montreux Years* from Etta James is also available.

Geoff Brown

Graham Lambkin

★★★★

Solos

BLANK FORMS. LP

Remastered LP boxset of the first four releases from the English experimental sound artist, plus glossy art book.

As a former member of the unsettling Folkestone art trio The Shadow Ring, Graham Lambkin never traded in beauty. Those records were dank works of claustrophobic black comedy, the kind of scrabbling hermit poetry one might hear issuing from the locked room in a haunted seaside B&B. With these, his first four solo releases, Lambkin reinterpreted Alvin Lucier's ideas of room resonance, recording himself listening to albums by other artists while simultaneously capturing the noise of his surroundings and his own huffing presence. Likening it to "trespassing on someone else's property", the effect is simultaneously intrusive and beautiful, especially on *Amateur Doubles* (included here), which is literally the warped tape sound of Lambkin and family in a cramped Honda Civic listening to CDs of '70s French prog-folk, swirling flute and synth sounds "remixed" with the hiss of passing cars, muttering children, and Lambkin's own creaking presence.

Andrew Male

Teaspoon And The Waves

★★★

Teaspoon And The Waves

MR BONGO. CD/LP

Township jazz-funk-disco.

Durban-born alto saxophonist Teaspoon Ndlela came to prominence in Johannesburg in the late '60s with his Gospel Horn Sound. After playing mbaqanga in the Makgona Tsohle Band and guesting with other prominent acts, he ruled the Joburg jazz-funk scene via a residency at Soweto's popular Pelican club, his playing leaning on Hank Crawford and Grover Washington. The major draw of this '77 LP with The Waves is Oh Yeh Soweto, an adaptation of Lamont Dozier's floorfiller Going Back To My Roots. Teaspoon's version is a trump card for many a DJ. Tracks like Saturday Express continue the hybrid, its disco beat and township bass line enlivened by throbbing congas, with clavinet and string synth layered on top, while Friday Night and Wind And Fire have slight reggae undercurrents, and Got Me Tight is upbeat jazz-funk with sparkling synth melodies matching Teaspoon's own.

David Katz

Various

★★★★

Stop The War! – More Vietnam Through The Eyes Of Black America 1966-1974

KENT. CD/DL

Spanning letters home to damning indictments, the Vietnam legacy laid bare.

Forty-six years after the Vietnam War ended and these dispatches from soul's frontline still hit a raw nerve. In particular Dr William Truly Jr's (The Two Wars Of) Old Black Joe, his 1970 sole release which details the struggle to get a black serviceman buried in a whites only cemetery. It's a brutal condemnation of conflict and prejudice then and, in line with recent events, still very pertinent today. There's also RB Greaves' blistering Home To Stay – not a celebration of a returning hero but instead narrating his funeral service. Thankfully, there are lighter moments here, such as Dionne Warwick's more subtle I Say A Little Prayer, Michael Lizzmore's Promise That You'll Wait, which is full of deep soul pleading, and The Shirelles' poppy (Mama) My Soldier Boy Is Coming Home.

Lois Wilson

Naomi Lewis

★★★★

Seagulls And Sunflowers

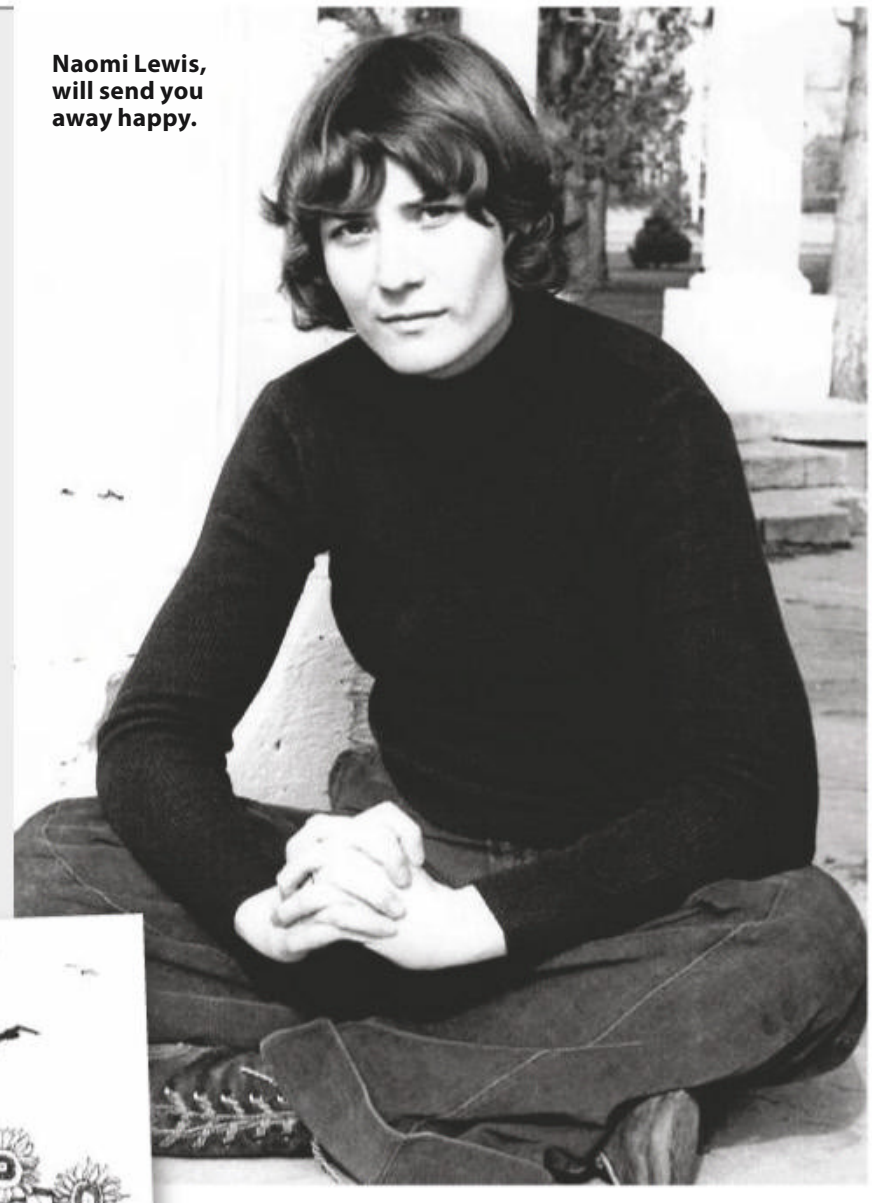
MAPACHE. LP

One of two vinyl reissues by Utah-based private press folk enigma.

In 1973, Oklahoma-born songwriter Naomi Lewis was living in a cottage in the Utah mountains, playing around with music influences she'd heard on her '60s travels from Nevada to Germany. "Friends came to the cottage downhearted," she says in the linernotes to this reissue. "I'd sing them a song and they'd go away happy."

Lewis recorded an album, *Cottage Songs*, intended as a gift to these friends, inspired by God and nature and influenced by everything from German schlager to Joni Mitchell. *Cottage Songs* has an intimate, naive simplicity at its core, bolstered by intricate arrangements that subtly utilise flute French horn, harp and horn section. More impressive again is this, her second and final album, which brings in bassoons and breakbeats, foregrounds Danny Ferguson's electric guitar and in its imagery edges closer to the eerie psychedelic feel of contemporary albums by Linda Perhacs, Susan Christie or Karen Beth.

Andrew Male



Naomi Lewis, will send you away happy.

Jozef Van Wissem/SQÜRL

★★★

Only Lovers Left Alive

SACRED BONES. CD/DL/LP

Director Jim Jarmusch and Dutch lutenist score 2014's continent-wide vampire tale.

There is a sulphurous chemistry between Jarmusch's noise trio SQÜRL and experimental lute player Van Wissem that undercuts his film's undead badinage between Tilda Swinton and Tom Hiddleston perfectly – all growling, midnight grooves, squalls of feedback and intricate acoustic picking. And while long-term musical foils Carter Logan and Shane Stoneback seemingly intuit when to ladle on the drama, a trio of collaborations supply the top-grade ruby nectar his leads clearly need to feed their doomed romance. Cults' singer Madeline Follin puts a sinister twist on Wanda Jackson's greatest B-side Funnel Of Love, Zola Jesus unleashes her full operatic force on In Templum Dei, before Lebanese singer Yasmine Hamdan's show-stealing Hal builds to a rapturous climax. Jarmusch's films don't always reward repeated viewings, but his soundtracks do.

Andy Cowan

Culture

★★★★

Children Of Zion: The High Note Singles Collection

DOCTOR BIRD. CD

All the Pottinger-produced singles, plus unreleased extended mixes.

After topping the reggae charts on both sides of the Atlantic with the apocalyptic Two Sevens Clash, roots trio Culture formed an alliance with producer Sonia Pottinger, who paired them with the Revolutionaries for a series of sublime albums, issued by Virgin between 1977-79. At the same time, Pottinger issued singles on her High Note and Sky Note labels, and this brilliant 3-CD compilation gathers all of them, with previously unreleased disco mixes that heighten the appeal. Songs like Work On Natty, Stop The Fighting and Down In Jamaica capture the group at their magnificent best and the dub B-sides allow us to better appreciate the musical intricacies, while alternates of Pyaka, Trod On and Too Long In Slavery remind how well these rhythms are suited to the extended-play format. Essential listening for Culture fans.

David Katz

Various

★★★

Too Slow To Disco: Yacht Soul – The Cover Versions

HOW DO YOU ARE?. CD/DL

The AOR phenomenon as covered by Aretha, Chaka, Quincy et al.

Sixteen soft-rock staples, mostly from the '70s/early '80s, penned by A-list white songwriters of the day and covered at the time by black singers in a sort of role reversal of the usual flow of influence in rock and pop's earlier decades. Star songwriter here: Michael McDonald, with three of his Doobie Brothers songs – Aretha Franklin's cover of What A Fool Believes, a standout, Peabo Bryson's Minute By Minute and Quincy Jones's Takin' It To The Streets, which is essentially a Luther Vandross/Gwen Guthrie duet – plus This Is It, co-written by McDonald and Kenny Loggins. This last song gets the most genuine soul re-make via an invigorating Millie Jackson rub down, man-shaming rap and all. Elsewhere, Billy Paul's Let 'Em In gives greater civil rights heft to Paul McCartney/Wings' original, but the Isleys had made Seals & Crofts' Summer Breeze their own just before The Main Ingredient got to it.

Geoff Brown

Various

★★★

Made To Measure Vol.1

CRAMMED DISCS. CD/DL/LP

Inaugurated in 1984, Belgian indie 'composers' series' now includes a vinyl remaster.

Over 20 years, Crammed's *Made To Measure* series documented a largely instrumental scene that filtered European art-house sensibilities through a post-punk prism. With nuclear power and the Cold War dominating the news, *Vol. 1*'s stark, icy, melancholic soundtracks were perfectly matched. Of the four artists featured here, first up are Euro-Israeli alliance Minimal Compact, by this point occupying similar turf to (and borrowing members from) US emigres Tuxedomoon, who close out the set with their distilled cabaret-jazz noir. Of the two Belgian delegates, Benjamin Lew's sole track À La Recherche De B is more suited to Eraserhead than the fashion exhibition it was commissioned for. Which leaves seven tracks by Aksak Mabou, the compilation's most eclectic troupe, whose sounds could work for a silent film, a David Lynch drama or a Wim Wenders road movie.

Martin Aston

Various

★★★★

Duke Reid International Disco Series: The Complete Collection

DOCTOR BIRD. CD

The greatest rock steady, reworked for extended EPs.

Duke Reid ruled rock steady with a superlative house band at Treasure Isle, led by Tommy McCook. When the dancehall style of the late 1970s saw many rock steady rhythms revived, Sonia Pottinger dug up the original master tapes for Reid's nephew, Errol Brown, to remix for extended 'disco mixes', some complete with new deejay cuts and overdubbed instrumentation, others merely flowing into extended dubs that emphasised the original musicianship. This excellent 3-CD set collects the entire series, treating us to reverberating mixes of Alton Ellis's Cry Tough, John Holt's Stealing and Joya Landis's Moonlight Lover. The Paragons' Riding High and The Sensations' Baby Love have corresponding deejay pieces by Jah Stone and there are previously unreleased killers, such as saxophonist Karl Bryan's Red Ash. The musical proficiency and tasteful remixing ensures overriding excellence, despite a few gratuitous syndrum overdubs.

David Katz

Soundtracking Addis: The Walias Band take the stairway to heaven.

Twisting by the pool

Ethiopia's greatest house band uncovered. By **David Hutcheon**.

Hailu Mergia & The Walias Band

★★★★

Tezeta

AWESOME TAPES FROM AFRICA. CD/DL/LP

ADDIS ABABA, 1975: curfew is about to fall, but you're in no mood for an early night. Shortly after 10pm, a taxi drops you at the Hilton, and you squeeze past the doorman distracted by the dignitaries and diplomats trying to grab cabs having had an old-school evening's entertainment and now trying to get home before the junta's patrols hit the streets looking for transgressors. On-stage, the house band are taking a break after a set that ran from Strangers In The Night to Yesterday. One of the group grabs a microphone and suggests the night is young: "Do. You. Feel. All. Right? This is a song by Wilson Pickett …" With a fanfare from Hailu Mergia on keys, The Walias are off. The front doors of the hotel won't open again until sunrise, nobody is allowed out until curfew lifts at 6am. Now, the epithet "Funky Addis" never felt more true.

With their roots in the early 1960s, The Walias Band were an Ethiopian phenomenon; the first autonomous band rather than hired hands, and the country's biggest names – Mulatu Astatke, Mahmoud Ahmed – sought them out. They spent the 1970s at the Hilton and, despite a schism after a 1981 tour of the US that resulted in half the band (including Mergia) remaining in the US, would continue as a unit into the 1990s. Never entirely "lost", their revival under Awesome Tapes' careful curation of Mergia's back catalogue has seen the price of original LPs reach eye-watering prices.

When *Tezeta*, their second LP, came out, in 1975, it was a sign that the Walias weren't content imitating American soul stars or, indeed, entirely fed up with waltz time if they could add something new to it. Mergia may well be the world's No.1 Booker T. fan, and there are nods to both the M.G.'s' later concepts – "Soundtrack to a lazy day in a rowing boat", perhaps – and the version of Stranger On The Shore that made the *Green Onions* LP. The title track, a traditional tune Mergia has never stopped playing, is a case in point: an Ethiopian blues scale built for dancing, with organ floating above a shuffle rhythm, subtle guitar and almost reluctant bass, while a flute solo steals the show.

Tezeta isn't the funkiest offering from Ethiopia but it's easy to imagine Zengadyw Dereku and Nefas New Zemedie soundtracking a classic Blaxploitation-era crime thriller, as Grave Digger Jones hunts looted Meqdela artefacts in Harlem. We may not be able to be poolside at the Addis Ababa Hilton before curfew tonight, but this is a perfect summer soundtrack wherever you are.

A generation in transit: (from left) Roberto Quartin, Ana Maria Bahiana, José Mauro.

FILE UNDER...

Comeback special

A Brazilian singer returns from the dead. By **Jim Irvin**.

IN SEPTEMBER 2016, when the Far Out label reissued *Obnoxius*, the strikingly assured 1970 debut album by mysterious young Brazilian singer José Mauro, the publicity material surrounding the release clearly suggested that Mauro was dead. The album, not exactly a hit in its day, had become a favourite of such renowned deep crate-diggers as Floating Points ("One of my Top 5"), Madlib and Gilles Peterson, who described it as "a holy grail". But as the record's fame grew, the amount of accurate information about the fate of its creator seemed to diminish. No one was sure how this beautiful young man had died – there were rumours circulating in forums that he'd perished in a car crash even before the album was released (though that was reasonably easy to disprove). Others claimed he had been "disappeared", a victim of the military dictatorship that ruled in Brazil during the '70s – but he must have died, so total had his silence been for so long.

Imagine the surprise, then, in 2018, when someone posted in the comments section of Far Out's website: "José Mauro is alive. I was talking with Lucas his friend, and he says that one label is stealing the copyrights of his album, but now he is sick and old, and [doesn't] have money for a lawyer." Two years later, Mauro's lyricist, Ana Maria Bahiana (pictured above and with Mauro on the front cover of *Obnoxius*), confirmed that he was still alive. A year on, finally, and with Mauro's blessing, here comes the first full release of his planned second album, *A Viagem Das Horas* (Far Out) ★★★★.

A record with that title had appeared in 1976. Producer and label boss Roberto Quartin had overseen the recording of enough material for two albums. But when his self-named label closed, Quartin moved to the USA and licensed the material to Tapecar, who issued nine of the songs on a 12-track album, bulked up with three cuts from *Obnoxius*. Those have been removed and replaced by three other, previously unreleased songs from the period, to restore the album Mauro had initially planned, housed in a sleeve mimicking the distinctive Quartin releases, which carried an image in a quarter circle on the front.

The songs fuse MPB, folk and bold, sometimes eerie orchestral arrangements by Lindolfo Gaya that are what really make these records sonically distinctive. Mauro sounds more mature and serious than he looks, his sonorous baritone tuneful, but dramatic. I can't comment on the Portuguese lyrics, but suddenly finding themselves living under a brutal dictatorship, Mauro and Bahiana, who shared an interest in Candomblé, a meld of traditional West African religions and Roman Catholicism, wanted their music to be a spiritual response. "Not believing in either civil war or fascism, we were part of a generation in transit, searching for another option," says Bahiana.

"Achieving a sense of wonder."

So what had become of Mauro in the years since? After the 1976 edition of *A Viagem Das Horas* was released, he worked for a while as music director at Rio's prestigious O Tablado Theatre School, and as a guitar teacher. But soon he fell ill – what with isn't specified – and became too frail to work. "My body pushed me away from music, health became a stumbling block for me," he says. "If I had the strength to carry on with composing, I would have always focused on achieving a sense of beauty, a sense of wonder."

It's a shame he lost years when he might have continued to make the stirring, emotive music heard on his two albums. It may be a small body of work, but it's one certainly worth getting to know.

Abbey Lincoln

★★★★★

Abbey Is Blue

CRAFT RECORDINGS. DL/LP

A civil rights-era jazz vocal classic.

Singer-songwriter-actress-activist Abbey Lincoln had plenty to be blue about in 1959: she was a black woman living in apartheid America and tired of the repertoire that limited jazz singers to Tin Pan Alley standards. On this revolutionary album, she took a left turn and uncovered songs by jazzers Duke Ellington, Mongo Santamaria and Oscar Brown, as well as Kurt Weill and poet Langston Hughes's Lonely House. And in her own Let Up, she expressed her artistic and political frustrations. The music ranges from moody to comforting, aided by the stark, nocturnal production that provided neat tricks like recording the trumpet away from the mike, creating a 3am ambience. Top-drawer musicians include drummer/future husband Max Roach and pianist Wynton Kelly. Throughout is that voice, bending blue notes and elongating phrases like no one else.

Michael Simmons

Amy Winehouse

★★★★

At The BBC

UMC/ISLAND. CD/DL/LP

2012 CD/DVD set is now an audio only package.

At The BBC comprises Amy Winehouse's TV and radio sessions plus live appearances stretching from 2003 to 2007. Together the 38 tracks provide a poignant reminder of what we lost: a torch singer who invested everything in her performance – eventually to her own cost – and who, during this timespan at least, balanced stylistic brilliance with emotional power and vitality. Her take on To Know Him Is To Love Him, recorded in 2006 for the Pete Mitchell Show, is peerless; the cover of Monkey Man at that year's Hootenanny joyous, clearly revelling in the presence of her hero Rico. Ultimately, though, it's Winehouse's own songs that have the most impact, in particular the stripped down versions of Tears Dry On Their Own and You Know I'm No Good from a 2007 performance at Porchester Hall. They are utterly beguiling and testament to her tormented genius.

Lois Wilson

Ian Carr

★★★★

Belladonna

MR BONGO. LP

British fusion stalwart's rare solo LP back on half-speed mastered vinyl.

Summer 1969: trumpeter Ian Carr leaves the Rendell-Carr Quintet – these days considered the British acoustic jazz dons – depressed at living the "scrappy and precarious" jazz life down a cultish cul de sac in a knitted tie. He seeks something more professional, more unbuttoned, and creates electric fusion troop Nucleus, gets a PA and a proper manager and signs to prog label Vertigo. This 1972 'solo' outing sees him testing out a new eight-man line-up 18 months after former linchpins Karl Jenkins and John Marshall had left to join Soft Machine. They make a more groove-oriented sound, akin to where Carr's hero Miles Davis had gone with *Jack Johnson* a year earlier. Standouts: the silent-to-boiling epic Belladonna, the wah wah clatter of Mayday, a soothing Summer Rain and Carr's own favourite, Suspension. Beautifully recreated by messers Bongo, complete with repro Vertigo inner bag and label.

Jim Irvin

Voom

★★★★

Hello, Are You There?

FLYING NUN. LP

Vinyl debut for the 2006 powerpop-plus gem.

New Zealand trio Voom haven't gone all out for fame: no touring overseas, and only two albums, eight years apart, the second being the ironically named *Hello, Are You There?* Track four offers a clue: it's called Happy Just Bumming Around. Yet Voom's buzzing, nonchalant powerpop is tailor-made for joyous communion, like the best album that Nada Surf, The Replacements and Lemonheads never made. Even a previously unreleased bonus track, Jimmy's Boner, is a wistful treasure. But like Paul Westerberg, chief Voomer Buzz Moller had a fatalistic side. Wobbly country lament My Friend Satan, the hazy I'm Leaving Forever and twilight ballad I Went To Sleep suggest a combination of Big Star's *Third* and *#1 Record* albums, and the likelihood that Big Star were Voom's greatest influence. Perhaps Muller shares Alex Chilton's distaste for doing what's expected of him.

Martin Aston

Soft Works

★★★

Abracadabra In Osaka

MOONJUNE. CD/DL/LP

Previously unreleased Soft Machine alumni reunion from 2003.

This short-lived quartet was just one of six spin-off bands that rose from the ashes of Soft Machine after the legendary Canterbury group dissolved in 1981. Soft Works followed in the wake of Soft Heap and Soft Head in the late '70s and Soft Ware in 1999. From those line-ups came bassist Hugh Hopper and saxophonist Elton Dean, who joined forces with drummer John Marshall and guitarist Allan Holdsworth in 2002 for the one-off studio LP, *Abracadabra*. Previously unreleased, this absorbing live recording captures the band performing their LP in Japan during 2003, garnishing their set with satisfying renditions of the Soft Machine classics Kings & Queens and Facelift. With Dean's exploratory saxophone flights jousting with Holdsworth's probing, angular fretwork over Hopper and Marshall's turbulent polyrhythms, the quartet create a richly textured sonic tapestry.

Charles Waring

Squarepusher

★★★★

Feed Me Weird Things

WARP. CD/DL/LP

Lavish, remastered edition of electronic gamechanger's debut marks its 25th.

Having quickly outgrown Chelmsford's thrash metal scene, Tom Jenkinson started to experiment with sequencers and drum machines. The resulting whirlwind of pelting, drill-like breakbeats allied to his fleet-fingered, virtuosic bass skills spun him into creative competition with Aphex Twin, the fellow sonic manipulator who sequenced this bumpy, non-linear, unrelenting debut. Odd jazzy angularities are at play in the semi-trad affectations of Squarepusher Theme and Kodack, bass-driven workouts that smuggle harps and flutes in the back door. They supply light against the stabbing synths and trebly metallic snares of Dimotane Co and North Circular or the heavy portents and spooked drones of UFOs Over Leytonstone. Appended with B-sides from the same year's Squarepusher Plays EP, unctuous slap-bass workout Deep Fried Pizza is the love/hate pineapple on top.

Andy Cowan

Don Cherry's New Researches

★★★★

Organic Music Theatre: Festival De Jazz De Chateauvallon 1972

BLANK FORMS. CD/DL/LP

Landmark transitional world-fusion live recording by legendary jazz trumpeter.

In balance: Don Cherry gets the class's attention.

THE ORGANIC Music Theatre was conceived in the late '60s by Don Cherry and his wife, the Swedish visual artist Moki, as a collaborative space for music, art and communal family life. Originally broadcast on French TV in 1972, this inaugural OMT performance at Chateauvallon Festival de Jazz finds Cherry in transition from the free rhythmic chaos of 1970's *"Mu"* to the unbounded world music drift of *Organic Music Society*. On-stage with multi-instrumentalists Christer Bothén, Doudou Gouirand and Naná Vasconcelos swapping horns for berimbau and Malian guitars, Cherry abandons trumpet for piano and vocals for an ethereal collection of religious chants, ceremonial hymns, plus a gorgeously untethered cover of Jim Pepper's Witchi Tai To, all interspersed with the cries of children and wild glossolalia from an on-stage puppet troupe(!). It is the sound of deep communion and mystical contemplation, an exhortation to total spiritual surrender that is difficult to resist.

Andrew Male

The Black Unity Trio

★★★★

Al – Fatihah

SALAAM/GOTTA GROOVE. LP

Only album by short-lived avant-garde jazz trio from industrial Cleveland.

Named after the first chapter of the Koran, the cover – a blurred image of three unsmiling polo-necked black men – projects a forbidding image of political defiance and religious anonymity. Yet this sole independent 1969 release might be one of the most fierily beautiful and welcoming epistles of cosmic free jazz ever recorded. All three players – saxophonist/double bassist Yusuf Mumin, cellist Abdul Wadud, drummer Hasan Shahid – had deep roots in the Cleveland music scene with families who knew Albert Ayler and Sun Ra, and all had their heads turned by witnessing John Coltrane live in 1966. This official reissue, cut from the original master tape, sounds astonishing, a swirling combination of hard rock drumming, eddying Arabic melodies, cool meditative cello interludes and total sonic attack. The group ended in 1970 following Shahid's arrest as a conscientious objector. It's astonishing to think where they could have gone next.

Andrew Male

The Graham Bond Organization

★★★★

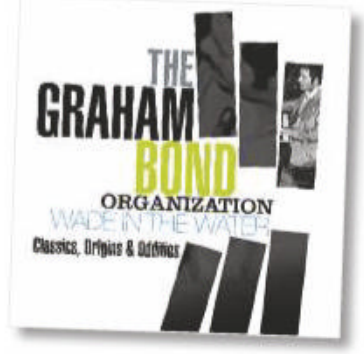
Wade In The Water

REPERTOIRE. CD

Comprehensive anthology of the influential '60s R&B combo.

Not quite everything, due to licensing issues, but this 4-CD set is otherwise pretty much perfect: tracking the jazz saxist-turned-Hammond R&B god's 1963 to '67 output, from Baby What You Want Me To Do, a raw blues with Alexis Korner and girl group The Velvettes, to You've Gotta Have Love Babe, a go-east psychedelic trip. In between: raucous at-the-Mod-club sessions with soulful vocalist Duffy Power, rare singles backing Jamaican jazz guitarist Ernest Ranglin and seven takes on Bond's signature Wade In The Water. Version four, from first album *The Sound Of '65*, is the snappiest, featuring Ginger Baker gonzo on drums. That debut plus the same year's *There's A Bond Between Us* are here, both in stereo – brighter, more vibrant sounding. All this and the in-demand Harmonica from the Gonks Go Beat soundtrack.

Lois Wilson



Ed Kuepper

★★★★

Singles '86-96

PRINCE MELON. CD/DL/LP

Bountiful highlights from Aussie punk ledge's turbo-fertile solo era.

Quitting Brisbane ramalama heroes The Saints after a major label flame-out in 1979, the ever-prickly guitarist left-turned with the genre-defying Laughing Clowns, but on 1985's *Electrical Storm* settled into a furiously prolific phase under his own name. With more approachable acoustic/electric arrangements and his melodic expertise to the fore, Kuepper again threatened to break big internationally, but ultimately helped define underground alt-rock's expansive Antipodean wing. Starting off brass-y and railroad-rattling on Also Sprach The King Of Euro-Disco, this 20-track singles round-up (with a bonus disc of B-sides) plots a then-unique marriage of blues/rock roots and boomily modern production, which eventually leads to the early-'90s homeland paydirt of smouldering ballads like The Way I Made You Feel. He even gives AC/DC's Highway To Hell a stirring once-over in that idiom. Later briefly a Bad Seed, Kuepper has sanctioned some Laughing Clowns reissues, and a chaotic 2018 live recording of his punker outfit, The Aints.

Andrew Perry

Jackie Leven and friend: he gave more than two hoots.

Iron & Wine

★★★★

Archive Series Volume No.5 : Tallahassee Recordings

SUB POP. CD/DL/LP

The Dead Sea Scrolls, or near as dammit, of Iron & Wine.

The latest record in the archive series that Sam Beam instigated six years ago is a slice of pre-history – *Tallahassee*, the lost debut album that dates back to 1988-9, three years before Iron & Wine's official Sub Pop debut *The Creek Drank The Cradle* (2002). Beam was a film student then, as was EJ Holowicki, his roommate, who's the other of the two musicians on this stripped-down, home-made, 11-song collection. EJ's on bass, and Beam on guitar, harmonica (not much more than a dash), drums (which have an oddly drum-machine quality) and those hushed, sometimes doubled gauzy, hypnotic vocals. There's a feast here for lovers of lo-fi folk: opener Why I Hate Winter, solemn and ponderous with slices of guitar sounding like sleet; the folk-Americana of John's Glass Eye and Ex-Lover Lucy Jones; and waltz-time low-voiced closer Valentine.

Sylvie Simmons

The Yardbirds

★★★

Live In France

REPERTOIRE. CD/LP

Fantastic live performances from Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page line-ups.

Fifteen recordings for French TV and radio, the first from June 20, 1965, three months after Eric Clapton had left. The Yardbirds are supporting The Beatles and the screams are deafening, but the performance tentative, Beck still finding his feet on For Your Love and I Wish You Would. By June 27, '66, at the Music Hall de France, with Page on bass, Beck is incendiary, tearing through Train Kept A-Rollin', Shapes Of Things and Over, Under, Sideways, Down. On the remainder, from the Grand Spectacle de Jeunes, Paris in '67 and Bouton Rouge at Maison de la Radio, Paris in '68, we see the future. With Beck gone, Page is at the helm: magnificent on You're A Better Man Than I and especially so with bow on Dazed And Confused.

Lois Wilson

Jackie Leven

★★★★

Straight Outta Caledonia SCHOOL DAZE. CD/DL/LP

Cherry-picking the voluminous back-pages of Kirkcaldy, Fife's great outsider songwriter.

"Jackie, this is not 1967 and you are not The Beatles," said Cooking Vinyl's Martin Goldschmidt when Leven sought to launch many LPs in quick succession. Nothing, not even strangulation in a street assault or the heroin addiction he overcame, could stem Leven's 40 albums-plus flow, until he died from cancer in 2011 aged 61. This thoughtful comp, with sleevenote nod from friend and fan Ian Rankin, is a timely Leven awareness campaign, showcasing his fearless lyrical acuity on The Sexual Loneliness Of Jesus Christ and the self-explanatory, bleakly beautiful Single Father. The emotional honesty of Leven's songs – witness the deft live version of social deprivation portrait Poortoun – creeps up on you, transporting and unsettling via a mellifluous voice with horn-like articulations. Though budgetary restrictions slightly hamstrung his recordings at times, more people need to hear Leven's stark, poetic truths.

James McNair

VINYL PACKAGE OF THE MONTH

Black Sabbath

Sabotage

BMG.

Released in 1975, *Sabotage* occupies a curious space in the Sabiverse: excluded from the preceding classic canon, yet in a different league from the subsequent rapidly diminishing returns. It's always ripe for reappraisal and this 4-LP box set does that job handsomely. Extensive sleevenotes provide context for the album's conflicted quality, a product of both artistic indecision – to rock or to prog, that was the question – and the band's energy being diverted into a year-long legal battle with dodgy managers. Ozzy Osbourne was on the slide into drug hell and Black Sabbath were on the verge of coming apart. Yet doubt and frustration got channelled into some extraordinary music: Hole In The Sky is biblical Tony Iommi riff lore, while The Writ has Ozzy audibly combusting with fury. Three live discs from the 1975 US tour (13 unreleased tracks; the box also contains a replica Madison Square Garden tourbook and poster, and a Japanese 7-inch single) reveal a band operating at remarkable intensity given their various internal ructions. The band's sleeve couture, however, remains very silly.

Keith Cameron

Grateful Dead

★★★

Grateful Dead

RHINO. CD/DL/LP

1971 live set – AKA *Skull & Roses* – gets the 50th anniversary upgrade.

"We're a regular shoot-'em-up saloon band," Jerry Garcia explained in 1971 and, if 1969's *Live Dead* presented the Grateful Dead as psychedelic explorers, *Skull & Roses* (working title: Skull Fuck) is mostly a rowdy, hard-partying affair, drawn from spring '71 shows. Great fun, as ever, and a clutch of then-new songs – especially a chiming, transcendent Wharf Rat – capture the band's intense creativity at the time. But even the addition of a July '71 gig, their last at the Fillmore West, can't detract from the feeling that *Skull & Roses* is ostensibly a trial run for the following year's magisterial *Europe '72*. There's always more Dead, of course, and heads are encouraged to pick up the excellent, if smaller-scale, reissue of *Road Trips Vol. 2 No. 3 – Wall Of Sound* from 1974, with Garcia at the top of his jazz game.

John Mulvey

Seefeel

★★★★

Succour

WARP/REPHLEX. DL/LP

Post-rock for a late-'90s world where Cocteaus-endorsed quartet won a parking space at Warp.

In the year that Richey Edwards went AWOL, Tommy Lee married Pamela Anderson and Tony Bennett's *MTV Unplugged* LP won a Grammy, Seefeel made history by moving from the Too Pure label to the more bleeding edge Warp – the first to bring their guitars. Led by sonic architect Mark Clifford, it's no accident that their second album (part of a lux reissue drive: this new vinyl edition adds an extra disc of bonus material) runs for one hour and one minute, such are the maths of these demandingly metronomic instrumentals. Ambient mood-setter Meol meanders between the ears and could summon sleep. Extract brings on lockstep drums to underpin a repeating Sarah Peacock fever dream; metallic grinding and urgent cymbals conjure Depeche Mode's '83 Neubauten about-turn. With Fracture pumped up like a bodybuilder, the bouncy roll of dub-underfelt Gatha stages a passive attack. From typewriter to muffled paranoia, Vex tests the fire alarm. *Succour* bows out with eight-and-a-half-minute meditation Utreat.

Andrew Collins

Pink Floyd

★★★

Live At Knebworth 1990

PLG/WARNER MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Headlining set from the Silver Clef Award Winners charity concert.

On June 30, 1990 Knebworth staged an all-star event with Pink Floyd topping the bill above the likes of Paul McCartney, Genesis and Tears For Fears. This is an atmospheric, beautifully recorded hour of music by the band's expanded touring line up, which featured Candy Dulfer on sax, Guy Pratt on bass and Gary Wallis adding percussion embellishments to Nick Mason's rather pedestrian drumming. The only post-Roger Waters track is Sorrow, and the set opens in stately fashion with the sonic panorama of Shine On You Crazy Diamond (Parts 1-5). David Gilmour lets rip spectacularly on Comfortably Numb and his echoed patterns set up the edgy drama of the closing Run Like Hell – complete with audible fireworks. But you know exactly what you are going to get, and there are no alarms and no surprises – apart from the rather ill-advised skanking section during an elongated Money.

Mike Barnes

COMING NEXT MONTH...

Noel Gallagher, Lump (pictured), Van Der Graaf Generator, Mudhoney, Howlin Rain, Durand Jones, Roky Erickson, Yola, Angelique Kidjo, King Gizzard And The Lizard Wizard and more.

REISSUES EXTRA

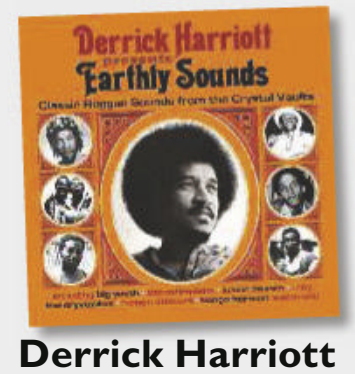
The Fall

★★★★

The Infotainment Scan

DEMON. LP

A Fall diamond from '93, MES's Number 9 hit(!) brings polished electronics, crisp tunes and counterblasts against pop nostalgia and celeb fawning. On swish clear vinyl, as are '94's *Middle Class Revolt* and '95's live *The Twenty-Seven Points*. *IH*



Derrick Harriott

★★★★

Presents Earthly Sounds

DOCTOR BIRD. CD

Producer Harriott marshalls The Crystalites, The Ethiopians *et al* for soulful vocals, Rasta drumming and instrumentals, with Big Youth, I Roy *et al* on rhythm re-rubs, DJing and dubs. Twenty new to CD! *IH*

Madness

★★★

7

UNION SQUARE. LP

Maddies' third LP, from 1981, now on 180g vinyl. Still gamely bouncing, though songs about depression, heart attacks, vivisection and urban drifting make for uneasy listening, segueing into 1982's concept piece *The Rise & Fall*. *IH*

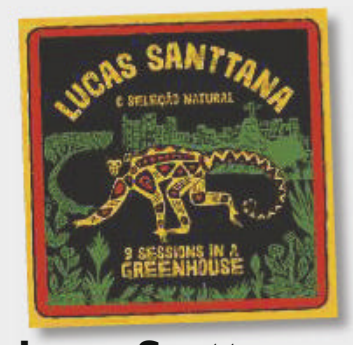
Ziad Rahbani

★★★★

Bennesbeh Labokra… Chou?

WE WANT SOUNDS. LP

Intriguing score for Rahbani's 1978 play, a Beirut social critique during the Lebanese civil war. The producer son of pop star Fairuz mixes Arabic music with jazz and bossa nova in a reflection of political and ideological tensions. *JB*



Lucas Santtana

★★★★

3 Sessions In A Greenhouse

MAIS UM. CD/DL/LP

A 2006 Brazilian cult item: flautist Santtana's futuristic splicing of samba with Black Ark-style dub, over three weed-enhanced nights in Rio. New remastering by Stefan Betke, AKA Pole, heightens the ping-boing fluency. *JB*

The Shins

★★★★

Oh, Inverted World

SUB POP. LP

Twenty-year Bob Ludwig remaster of an album that reset US indie with judicious deployment of '60 psych pop and James Mercer's balance of ebullience with doubt. The newly finessed sound is consistent with Mercer's erudite craftsmanship. *JB*

Spiritualized

★★★★

Pure Phase

FAT POSSUM. LP

SPZ's vinyl campaign rolls on with their second album, a relatively overlooked set of looser garage jams, whispered gospel, detailed ambience and frazzled mix science. Neon-lit systems instrumental Electric Mainline remains a pulsating career highlight. *JM*

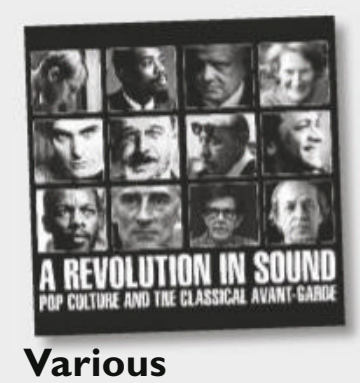
The Wedding Present

★★★★

Seamonsters

SONY LEGACY. LP

Two-LP-plus-CD edition of '91 album that saw David Gedge's Leeds stalwarts swap chaste jangles for blasted, Steve Albini-enabled landscapes of obsession and betrayal (see Corduroy and Dalliance). Peel Sessions/B-sides augment. *DE*



Various

★★★★

A Revolution In Sound

CHERRY RED. CD

This 4-CD trawl through popular music's outré limits acts like an Observer's Book of muso name-dropping: from modern classical (Stockhausen, Ives) to free jazz (Coltrane, Coleman) and early electronics (Daphne Oram), on to Indian classical (Ravi Shankar). *JB*

RATINGS & FORMATS

Your guide to the month's best music is now even more definitive with our handy format guide.

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★★★★★ MOJO CLASSIC
★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★ GOOD
★★ DISAPPOINTING
★ BEST AVOIDED
☆ DEPLORABLE

Straight outta Kilburn: Ian Dury, Lord Upminster of Stiff.

Stiff Records

A rough-and-ready rogues' gallery, curated by **Pat Gilbert**.

YOU DIDN'T have to be a loveable lunatic to be signed to Stiff Records, but it helped. Established back in summer 1976 by two key figures on the pub rock scene – Dave Robinson and Jake Riviera – the London-based independent label was to revolutionise the way the UK music business operated. The basic premise was to sign all the gifted misfits the majors wouldn't touch with a bargepole – Nick Lowe, Pink Fairies, Roogalator, Tyla Gang – and release a string of singles that would, if not change the world, then at least prove that the spirit of outsider rock'n'roll was still alive and well and living at Stiff's offices in Alexander Street, Westbourne Grove, W2.

It would be Stiff's sixth single that was the gamechanger: The Damned's New Rose, released in October 1976, was punk's first outing on vinyl, and opened the door for more rough-and-ready rogues who, unlikely as it looked on paper, would go on to become Top Of The Pops staples: Ian Dury, Elvis Costello, Wreckless Eric, Lene Lovich, Madness, The Pogues.

Key to the label's success was Robinson's knack for marketing gimmicks that would quickly become music biz norms: coloured vinyl pressings, picture sleeves, 12-inch singles, posters, jigsaws, plus badges and T-shirts bearing natty slogans like "Surfing On The Crest Of The New Wave" and, notoriously, "If It Ain't Stiff, It Ain't Worth A Fuck". There were Stiff package tours and customised Stiff clocks warning "When you kill time, you murder success". Graphics magus Barney Bubbles was charged with creating the label's distinctive artwork, while discipline was kept via the baseball bat under Robinson's desk.

It wasn't all plain sailing, though. After the critical and commercial success of Elvis Costello's debut album *My Aim Is True*, Riviera split from the label taking Costello and Nick Lowe with him. But Robinson quickly righted the ailing ship, breaking Ian Dury in the wake of *New Boots And Panties!!* and bringing Madness into the crew. (The nautical metaphors are apt: the boat-mad Robinson once bought a barge in Holland and reportedly navigated it to back to Britain by following a cross-channel ferry.)

In the early '80s, with Tenpole Tudor and Tracey Ullman in the charts, Robinson was seconded to then-struggling Island Records – whom he bailed out financially – taking his eye off the Stiff A&R ball. Nevertheless, he was back in time to nurture The Pogues' ascent, and see out the label's last days with intriguing signings such as Furniture and Phranc. Stiff was energetically resurrected in 2006, with some familiar faces on board, but within two years it really was all over. But what a legacy – if it wasn't Stiff, often it really wasn't worth a fuck.

"Discipline was kept via a baseball bat under a desk."

CAST YOUR VOTES...

This month you chose your Top 10 Stiff LPs. Next month we want your Super Furry Animals Top 10. Send selections via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy Super Furry Animals' and we'll print the best comments.

10 Various
Live Stiffs Live

STIFF, 1977

You say: "One of the great live albums – the true grit and greasy thrill of early Stiff is right here." Paul McDonald, via e-mail

Anyone searching for a vivid snapshot of what Stiff Records was all about should look no further that this aural memento of the label's infamous package tour of autumn 1977. Earthy, gritty, funky, geezer-ish, it captures Nick Lowe, Elvis Costello, Ian Dury, Wreckless Eric and Larry Wallis in their urgent prime. Introduced by Stiff PR man and future Clash barker Kosmo Vinyl calling the audience away from the bar – followed by Nick Lowe inquiring, off-microphone, "What we doin'?", before launching into a tearaway I Knew The Bride (When She Used To Rock And Roll) – it reeked of sticky pub carpets and, well, one hell of a fun night out.

4 The Pogues
Rum Sodomy & The Lash

STIFF, 1985

You say: "Shane's finest work – and an Elvis Costello production, don't forget." Rory Fitzpatrick, via e-mail

Punk scenester Shane MacGowan, a poet manqué with an alcohol problem and an obsession with his Irish ancestry, was, in retrospect, always a potential Stiff hero, but his flowering into a folk songwriter of uncommon genius was yet to be proven when The Pogues signed to Stiff in 1984. But by this second LP, released in '85, MacGowan's compositions A Pair Of Brown Eyes and Sally MacLennane dwarfed pretty much anything in the trad canon the group deigned to cover. Add a powerful reading of Eric Bogle's And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda and bassist Cait O'Riordan – a future Mrs Costello – singing I'm A Man You Don't Meet Every Day, and what's not to love?

Getty, Shutterstock

9 The Feelies
Crazy Rhythms

STIFF, 1980

You say: "Wired, wonderful, influential. Proves Stiff could see beyond the pub rock scene." Ian Blake, via Facebook

Though not a representative Stiff release – in fact quite the opposite, The Feelies being Americans with a smart collegiate image that implied real ale, roll-ups and a swift smack in the mush weren't their thing – *Crazy Rhythms* nevertheless bore a Stiff catalogue number from an era when the label were attempting to make an impact Stateside. Robinson's A&R ears were, as usual, highly attuned, and *Crazy Rhythms*, with its boxy, proto-Violent Femmes vibe and jingly, almost African-sound guitars, would become highly influential, not least on R.E.M., whose Peter Buck would produce its belated follow-up. Opening track The Boy With The Perpetual Nervousness hasn't dated a day in 41 years.

8 The Belle Stars
The Belle Stars

STIFF, 1983

You say: "Deftly mixing punky pop with 2-Tone and smooth '80s production. Sign Of The Times in particular will never date." Sophie Levine, via e-mail

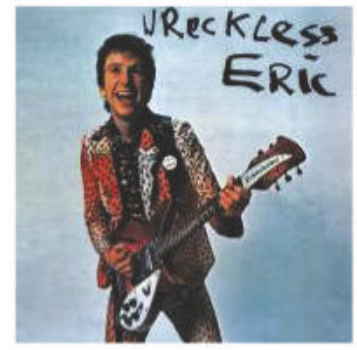
It wasn't *all* hoary old lemon squeezers on Stiff: after the all-female 2-Tone act The Bodysnatchers re-shaped themselves as The Belle Stars, having swapped singer Rhoda Dakar for Jennie Matthias, Dave Robinson was quick to spot their chart potential. Teamed with Dexys producer Pete Wingfield, and with a fine line in originals – namely the jingly soul-pop hit Sign Of The Times and languid Indian Summer – they briefly gave Bananarama a scare; their covers of The Clapping Song and Sugar Boy And His Cane Cutters' Iko Iko had a pure *joie de vivre* that made this self-titled debut sizzle.

7 Chris Difford
The Last Temptation Of Chris

STIFF, 2008

You say: "Difford must have made Glenn Tilbrook an insy bit jeal with this cracker…" Pete Marsh, via Facebook

Stiff's relaunch in 2007 was widely regarded as mild heresy, but its new owners ZTT had the best intentions, getting the old gang back together: Wreckless Eric, Any Trouble, The Yachts' Henry Priestman, plus new boy Chris Difford, whose south London council house poetry in Squeeze couldn't have been more Stiff-friendly. This album, with music by Boo Hewerdine, was the label's comeback jewel, an understated triumph of unhurried craftsmanship from opener Come On Down to Reverso, the strange account of a backwards vasectomy, and best of all Battersea Boys, a maudlin, wheezy Christmas-y tale of alcoholism, children's homes, and brotherly love.



6 Wreckless Eric
Wreckless Eric

STIFF, 1978

You say: "I bought this when it came out and still play it. Pure genius." Fred Andrews, via mojo4music.com

Like Ian Dury, Eric Goulden was art school taught but rock'n'roll educated, so when the latter saw the former performing with Kilburn And The High Roads in Oldham in the mid-'70s the path ahead for him seemed obvious. What few could foresee, even perhaps Goulden himself, was his peculiar knack for clever, oddball tunes, as saluted on *Wreckless Eric*, where the lopsided, bouncy pop stylings of Reconnez Cherie and the masterfully simple Whole Wide World – the best record The Troggs never made – would bring a smile to the nation's face. His cheeky chappie South Coast shtick was pure Stiff: so was his OTT cover of the High Roads' Rough Kids, another highlight of this charming debut.

5 The Damned
Damned Damned Damned

STIFF, 1977

You say: "An unhinged classic, it created so many disciples" Stephen Kenneth, via mojo4music.com

As the first British punk album, *Damned Damned Damned* was a feather in Stiff's cap, showing the lightning speed at which they could react to grassroots flare-ups compared with the majors. Gnarly and dirty and loud, with the connection between Brian James, Captain Sensible and Rat Scabies suggesting an almost free jazz telepathy (albeit of a nasty, garage rock kind). And the best material on the album – New Rose, Neat Neat Neat, Born To Kill, the bluesy Fan Club – would never be topped in new wave times for its sable allure. Having a guitarist who performed naked and a singer dressed as a vampire blew open the doors for subsequent Stiff eccentrics.

3 Madness
One Step Beyond…

STIFF, 1979

You say: "A whole new world of fun and energy and stooped smarts." Bill McCoy, via mojo4music.com

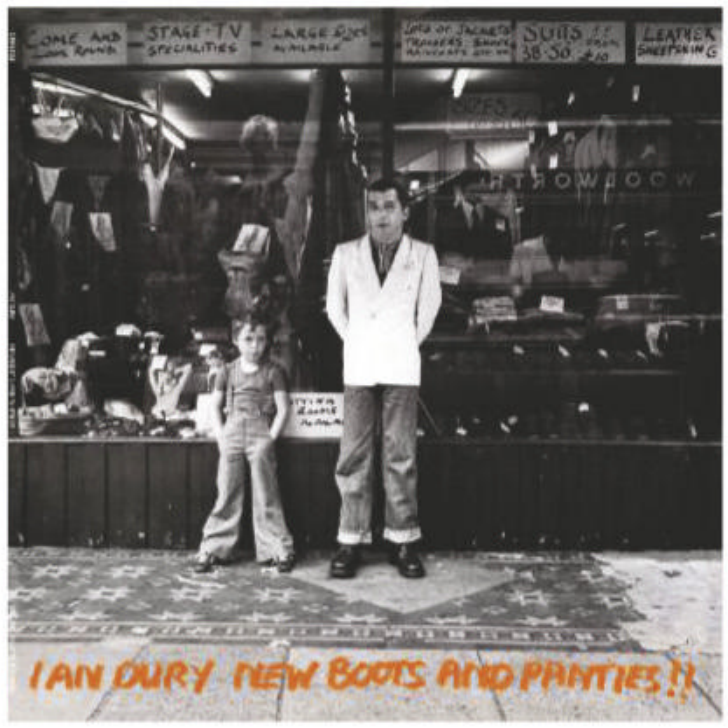
Madness's chart success would bankroll Stiff during the early 1980s, but when the label signed the group after their 2-Tone debut hit, The Prince, it was their "folk" quality – as Robinson described it – that attracted him. Not fiddles or uilleann pipes, but the fact the Nutty Boys' songs spoke about the lives of misfit youngsters everywhere: the borstal memoir Land Of Hope And Glory, the difficult love lessons of My Girl, the sofa-surfing Bed And Breakfast Man, all brought to life with Madness's happy-accident mix of exuberant ska rhythms, honking saxophones, wonky fairground Wurlitzer and Suggs's deadpan vocals. Twenty-odd chart hits and a long career would follow.

2 Elvis Costello
My Aim Is True

STIFF, 1977

You say: "Announced an extraordinary new songwriting talent; one as unafraid to be angry as he was to write a tender ballad." Jeremy Shatan, via mojo4music.com

Rarely has a songwriter arrived so fully formed on his debut album as Costello on *My Aim Is True*. The fact he'd been quietly perfecting his art for years played its part, but a proper day job meant Elvis still had to bunk off work to record this with Nick Lowe at Pathway Studios in Islington and a backing group later revealed as visiting American country rockers Clover. The intelligence of Costello's writing and a musical style situated in a fascinating space between The Clash and Little Feat can't wholly explain the quirky brilliance of Welcome To The Working Week, Less Than Zero, Alison, et al, but history attests whatever Costello was doing was magical.



Ian Dury
New Boots And Panties!!

STIFF, 1977

You say: "Blew my head off as a 15-year-old punk rocker. I remember telling everyone in school what a great album it was: no one believed me!" Dave Portch, via mojo4music.com

He was the supreme Stiff artist, because which other label would have nurtured the musical ambitions of a 35-year-old art teacher crippled as child by polio? Despite Kilburn And The High Roads' popularity on the pub rock circuit, by 1977 Ian Dury had yet to score even a modest chart hit. But Stiff took a punt on his solo debut, a record alive with the Cockney musical hall-style characters Billericay Dickie, Plaistow Patricia and Clever Trevor, smutty wordplay, choice profanities ("arseholes, bastards, fucking cunts and pricks"), a salute to fellow disabled rocker Gene Vincent, and a slick, sleazy funkiness via co-writer/keyboardist Chas Jankel, bassist Norman Watt-Roy and drummer Charley Charles. Very naughty, very nice, it was not an immediate hit, but within a year became a new wave must-have. Its reputation hasn't dimmed at all.

NOW DIG THIS

For those who still prefer to view Stiff as primarily a singles label –Riviera and Robinson's original idea, of course – then *The Big Stiff Box Set* will make you very happy indeed. Compiled and released as a 4-CD package in 2007, it brings together 98 tracks that unfold Stiff's tempestuous ride, from its days as an asylum for beery rock'n'rollers and fringe punks (cue The Pink Fairies, the Tyla Gang, The Adverts) to its difficult mid-to-late '80s grappling with a new pop landscape (Via Vagabond, Passion Puppets, Furniture), and beyond to its 2007 relaunch. Myriad rough diamonds reveal themselves – Plummet Airlines' plangent Silver Shirt being at least one 24-carat obscurio.

Pottering about in the shed: England at the Marquee, 1978 (clockwise from top left) Phil Gill, Jode Leigh, Franc Holland, Robert Webb; (inset below) the sawn-off Mellotrony.

CREDITS

Tracks: Midnight Madness / All Alone / Three Piece Suite / Paraffinalea / Yellow / Poisoned Youth

Producer: England, David Hitchcock

Released: 1977

Recorded: Air Studios, Morgan Studios, The Rolling Stones mobile studio

Personnel: Robert Webb (keyboards, vocals), Martin Henderson (bass, vocals), Franc Holland (guitar, vocals), Jode Leigh (percussion, vocals, bass)

Chart peak: none

Current availability: Expanded Golden Edition (New Music – Green Tree Records, 2015)

Hut rockin' tonite

This month's lost artefact: out-of-time prog made with half of Brian Jones's Mellotron.

England
Garden Shed

ARISTA, 1977

THE PARTIAL destruction of a classic Mark II Mellotron that once belonged to Brian Jones isn't a typical claim to fame in music circles, but over the decades, keyboardist Robert Webb's so-called 'Half-A-Tron' has become a novel hook in the legend around the quartet called England. Yet the real story is the only album released during their lifetime – a prosaically titled but dazzlingly rendered prog listening experience which was markedly out of kilter with its times.

England's troubled saga began with Sussex-based drummer Mark Ibbotson, who formed England in the early '70s, churning through different incarnations until he met Webb and guitarist Jamie Moses. Even in his teens, Webb could play lead parts equally well with either hand, Rick Wakeman-style, and while working as an organ salesman at the Croydon branch of Western Music, he added jazz licks (thanks to lessons from the shop manager) to his classical and rock "colour ideas", as Webb puts it.

Conflating his instrumental vision with the recorded music business proved harder to sustain. After playing with prog band Angel, that group's guitarist Jamie Moses persuaded him to join Madrigal, who became Merlin, a glam-pop tilt at the big time overseen by prolific hitmaker Roger Greenaway. After one minor chart hit (Let Me Put My Spell On You), Greenaway lost interest. Webb and Moses' next venture was a new prog band, Royce, but lead singer Nigel Benjamin was "stolen" by Mott as a replacement for Ian Hunter. "We were furious, but what can you do?" says Webb. "But then Jamie met Mark [Ibbotson], who was an extraordinary figure. He owned a big house in the country, an E-Type Jag and loads of equipment, including a Mellotron, though we never knew how he accumulated everything."

Another unpredictable character was England's new manager, "a merchant banker who wanted to get into the music business," says Webb. A 26-minute showcase, Imperial Hotel, was demoed, but Moses soon bailed ("Jamie was fed up with having no money"). His replacement, Franc Holland, and new bassist Martin Henderson made four, but then Ibbotson also quit. Still, Arista were keen to sign England, and paid an advance which allowed the band to tour. Webb had refused to give Ibbotson's Mellotron back – "We'd come too far for this guy to jeopardise our whole situation" – and given the bulk and weight of the Mark II double keyboard, he decided to sacrilegiously saw it in half, preserving the one keyboard and associated machinery that he deemed essential.

Armed also with mini-Moog, grand piano and Hammond organ, Webb's 'colour ideas' saturated *Garden Shed*, a dynamic zig-zagging landscape pitched perfectly between the early Genesis, Yes and Caravan models of prog, with Webb's high-pitched vocals reminiscent of Yes frontman Jon Anderson. One track, All Alone, recalled a harmony-heavy Queen ballad ("Merlin got compared a lot to Queen," says Webb), while Yellow (written by new drummer Jode Leigh) struck a more blissful, pastoral tone. But the twin poles of *Garden Shed* were the exuberant 12 minutes of Three Piece Suite and 16-minute finale Poisoned Youth, where Webb extracted the most from his bastardised Half-a-Tron.

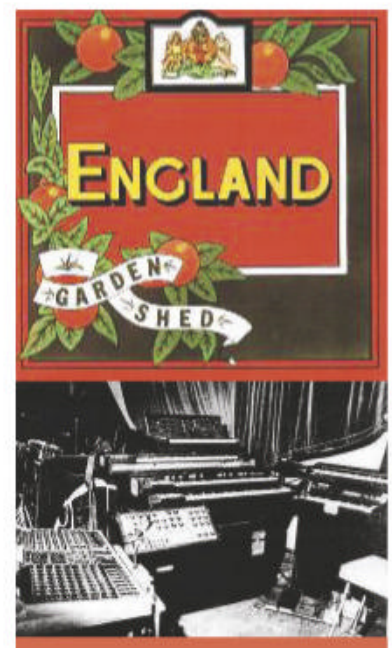
Peak prog, then. Annie Nightingale raved over lead single Paraffinalea: "England is destined for great things," she predicted. Melody Maker liked the single too, but its review of *Garden Shed* started with "Yes in Toyland." Webb was initially hurt, "but others said, 'it acknowledges you're as good as Yes, but with a different, more childlike slant'. Alan Freeman played [opening track] Midnight Madness on Radio 1, but nothing came of any of it."

The album's true death knell, though, was delivered by punk. At gob and anarchy's commercial zenith in 1977, without a fanbase or live reputation, England were always going to struggle. "Prog was old hat," says Webb. "Musically, I had no problem with punk, but the media adopted it as a new trend, to the detriment of bands like England who continued to make interesting, deeper music."

Feeling battered by circumstance, Webb split the band, sold equipment to pay off debts, including the Half-a-Tron, and immersed himself in session work. Yet, towards the end of the '80s, Webb heard about *Garden Shed* being bootlegged in Japan, and declared, "Someone loved us after all!" Official reissues followed in 1997 and 2005, with artwork as originally intended. "I think there are 17 versions of *Garden Shed* out there, legal and illegal," says Webb. "It has its own life now."

Webb and bassist Henderson even fronted a version of England for two shows at prog festivals in Japan and Mexico in 2006. Guitarist Holland joined a one-off UK show in 2019, with Leigh (unable to drum due to ill-health) adding vocals to a rendition of Poisoned Youth. Despite the pitfalls, Webb is philosophical about England's fate. "I feel privileged," he says. "Any interest in *Garden Shed* has purely been from the ground up, because people have actually listened to the music. That's enough for me."

Martin Aston



"We were furious, but what can you do?"
ROBERT WEBB

Ann Arbor (4)

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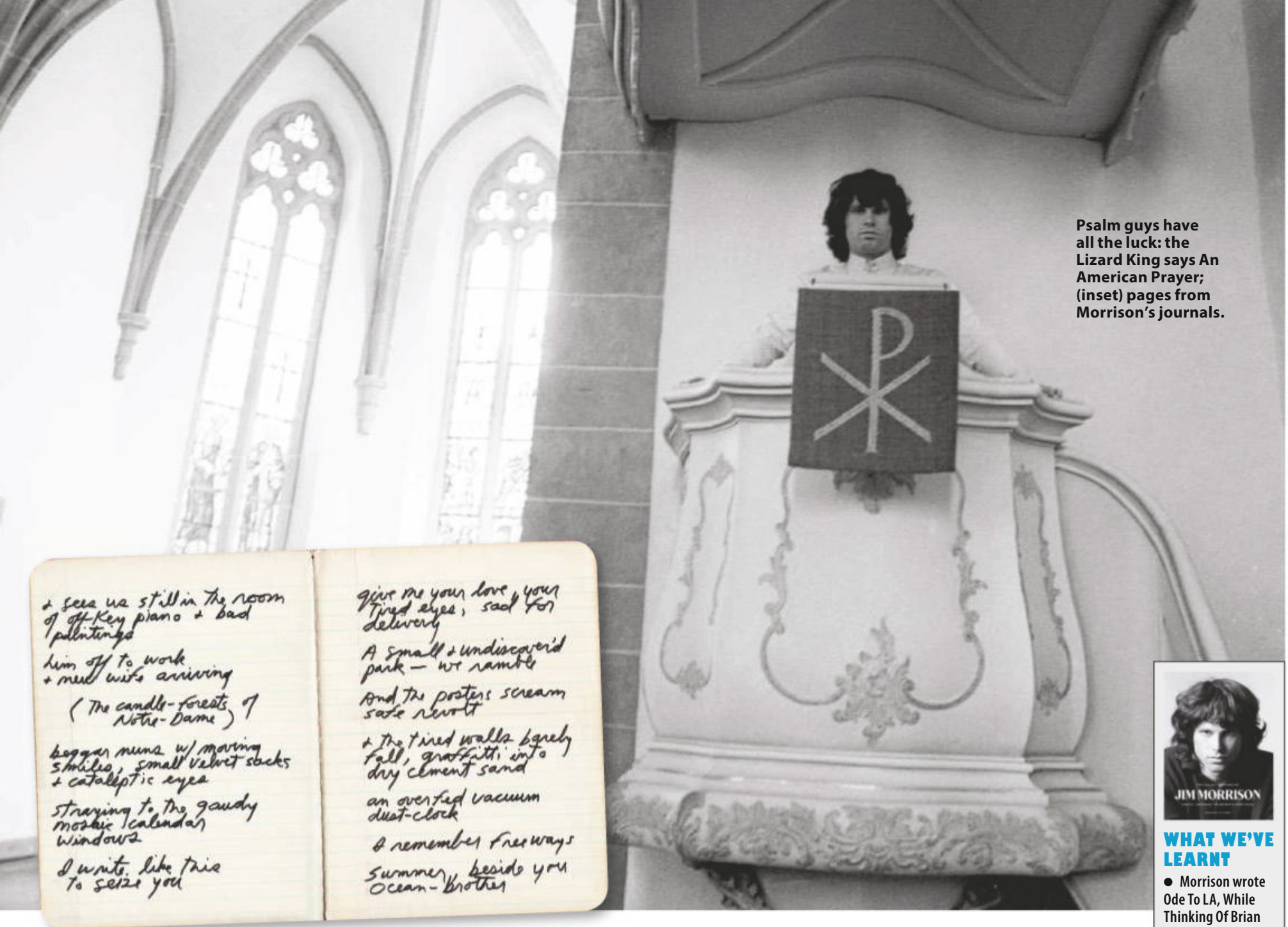


Psalm guys have all the luck: the Lizard King says An American Prayer; (inset) pages from Morrison's journals.

& seen us still in the room of off-key piano & bad paintings
him off to work & new wife arriving
(The candle-forests of Notre-Dame)
beggar nuns w/ moving shoulders, small velvet sacks & cataleptic eyes
straying to the gaudy mosaic calendar windows
I write like this to seize you
give me your love, your tired eyes, sad for delivery
A small & undiscovered park — we ramble
And the posters scream sole revolt
& the tired walls barely fall, graffiti into dry cement sand
an overfed vacuum duet-clock
& remembered freeways
summer, beside you
Ocean-Brother

Dionysian writes

The first comprehensive compendium of Jim Morrison the Poet. By **David Fricke**.

The Collected Works Of Jim Morrison

★★★★

James Douglas Morrison

HARPER DESIGN. £40

IN AUGUST 1967, during the sessions for The Doors' second album, *Strange Days*, singer-lyricist Jim Morrison performed 90 seconds of spoken, free verse, set to a theatrical mêleé of *musique concrète* and death-cry effects. Sixteen lines of ancient seafaring terror and cruel sacrifice recited with slow-motion fury, Horse Latitudes was Morrison's recorded debut as a poet – as opposed to an electrifying singer with a lyric vision descended from Burroughs, Rimbaud and Willie Dixon. It was also a rare artefact of Morrison's youth, written when he was a teenager in the thrall of the French symbolists and 17th century demonology. "I kept a lot of notebooks in high school and college," he said in 1969. "When I left school, for some dumb reason… I threw them all away… But, maybe if I'd never thrown them away, I'd never have written anything original… I'd never have been free."

That quote appears early in The Collected Works, on the page facing Horse Latitudes, following one other relic of Morrison's adolescent striving: The Pony Express, a Wild West fantasia. Everything else in this first, comprehensive monument to Morrison the Poet – at nearly 600 hardback pages, the weight of a medieval psalter – comes from his last seven years, including the self-published volumes The New Creatures, The Lords/Notes On Vision and An American Prayer, plus poems contributed to underground magazines; Morrison's notebooks from his 1969 obscenity trial in Miami; and final thoughts from Paris before his death in 1971.

Morrison's lyrics for The Doors get a section to themselves, but the literary mission and pop-chorus rigour in The End, When The Music's Over and LA Woman are diminished on the page, separated from that avenging-Sinatra baritone and The Doors' martial-garage force.

Conversely, The Celebration Of The Lizard, the epic piece The Doors failed to capture on vinyl, makes more sense in this context, reproduced with Morrison's pages of handwritten manuscript including apparent stage directions – "Wait! There's been a slaughter here [siren]" – as if he had written it for The Living Theatre instead. Indeed, the general conception that Morrison's drinking and legal woes made him erratic and unreliable on later Doors LPs is belied by the volume of composition and experiment – terse, vivid explosions of violent reckoning and determined euphoria – that he kept to himself or took to adventures outside the band such as the 1969 and December 1970 spoken-word recordings, which are included here in full transcripts.

There are moments when Morrison caves to caricature ("Lament For The Death Of My Cock"). More remarkable are the sharp, descriptive powers – his haiku-like assessments of the jurors in Miami – and the jolts of vulnerability, as in this striking confession from the defendant's chair: "I have been leading a commune life, shielded from adults… Miami an education." And in an epilogue titled As I Look Back, drawn from autobiographical fragments, Morrison proves he would have made a lethal rock critic, summing up his own vocal gifts as, well, underwhelming: "nasal whine of a/repressed adolescent/minor squeaks & furies/An interesting singer/at best."

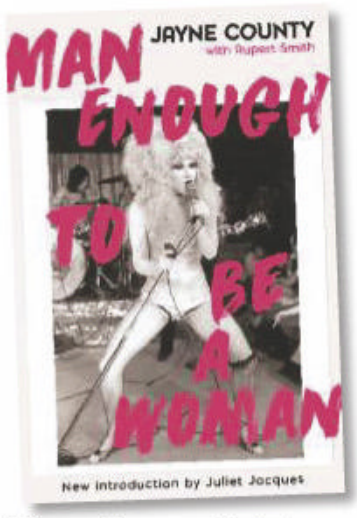
He was, of course, better than that. But Morrison wanted more. Here is the scale of that ambition beyond the records, as much of it as he could write down before the end.

> "I have been living a commune life, shielded from adults."
> JIM MORRISON

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- Morrison wrote Ode To LA, While Thinking Of Brian Jones, Deceased the day after The Rolling Stones' guitarist's death on July 3, 1969. The Doors singer passed away on that very date two years later. They were both 27.
- Morrison published 1970's An American Prayer in a run of 250 copies, designed to be small enough to fit in the back pocket of a pair of jeans.
- The audiobook of The Collected Works features Morrison's entire 1970 spoken-word session at Village Recorders in Los Angeles. The date, December 8, was his 27th birthday. At the end, you can hear him invite everyone in the studio out for tacos.

Getty



Man Enough To Be A Woman

★★★★

Jayne County with Rupert Smith

SERPENT'S TAIL. £12.99

Intimate storytelling from trailblazing trans-singer.

Aunt Vivien killed her husband with a shotgun. That's how things got solved in Dallas, Georgia, wrote Jayne County in her 1995 memoir, brought up to date here with a new epilogue. It's in Dallas, aged six, that County, born Wayne Rogers, realised she would rather be a girl and now, aged 75, she's returned to the vicinity, as an artist with 19 cats. In between, she faced discrimination at every turn but never succumbed. She spent the 1960s in New York getting schooled by Andy Warhol's Factory and was on the frontline at the Stonewall Riots. In the '70s she relocated to London and with the Electric Chairs released one of the punk era's defining singles, Fuck Off. Then on to West Berlin in the '80s to become a figurehead of the queer underground as a stage actor. Inspiring, absorbing, County emerges as "a possibility model", someone who fought discrimination and won.

Lois Wilson

Seeing Sideways: A Memoir Of Music And Motherhood

★★★★

Kristin Hersh

JAWBONE. £14.95

Throwing Muses linchpin's sequel to teenage-centred Paradoxical Undressing.

Alongside band and solo records, and three books, Hersh has given birth to four sons. The first, Doony, preceded Throwing Muses' 1986 debut by a year. Her songs were already barbed and anxious, and losing custody of her son in 1990 (Doony's dad cited Hersh's mental fragility and itinerant lifestyle) triggered PTSD. While raising (and home-schooling) Ryder, Wyatt and Bodhi with their dad, she battles major labels ("Zombie Satan") and fate, as their home is lost in a flood, Hersh almost drowns and Wyatt almost dies. Seeing Sideways is an acutely tense tale but Hersh has always alchemised pain into beauty. Her prose resembles lyrics ("Desert wind harmonica'd through conifers and a bottle clanked with it") and her maternal philosophy is touching ("Fear? Maybe leave it as the question mark it will be when you step over it"). For Hersh, music and motherhood go together: "two engaging ways to disappear behind beautiful, blooming things."

Martin Aston

Growing Out Of It – Machinations Before Madness

★★★★

Lee Thompson

OMNIBUS. £16.99

Hyperactive saxophonist's ripping yarns – from approved school to Top Of The Pops.

The pre-history and early years of Madness have been deeply mined and Lee Thompson has already revisited them in his excellent 2018 documentary One Man's Madness. But his is undoubtedly a brilliant and unusual story – taking him from a teenage life of petty criminality to performing on the roof of Buckingham Palace with the band to mark The Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Co-authored with Ian Snowball, Growing Out Of It allows Thompson to go into great detail while often colouring outside the margins of his self-imposed narrative framing, which is supposed to end in 1979 just as Madness have become pop stars. Footnotes hint at other stories, such as his late-'80s wilderness years experimentation with an overload of magic mushrooms. But clearly that's a tale for quite possibly another book.

Tom Doyle

Pegasus Epitaph: The Story Of The Legendary Rock Group Love

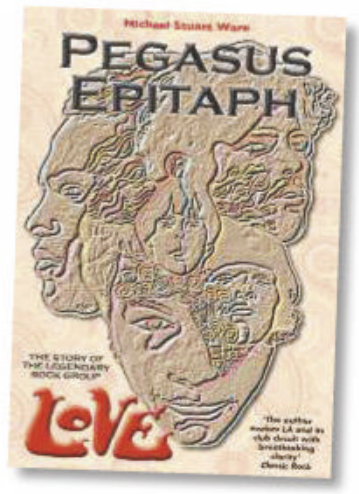
★★★★

Michael Stuart Ware

EXTRADITION/CADIZ PUBLISHING. £12.99

Riveting memoir by the drummer from Love's golden era, first published in 2003, now revised and updated.

Michael Stuart Ware's story hits its stride in his vivid descriptions of the mid-'60s club scene on LA's Sunset Strip when he was playing in The Sons Of Adam. He then joined Love, despite their already "ominous" drug reputation. The band were led by the charismatic Arthur Lee, whose



creativity he admired, but who could be duplicitous, manipulative and cruel. He seemed in control, but his cavalier attitude towards the music business bordered on self-destructive, and he began to lose his way, having sacked the band after *Forever Changes*. There are many amusing reminiscences – particularly Lee angrily remonstrating with a tripping Jim Morrison for "grossing out" the band's neighbours by lounging naked by their swimming pool, and the author rattling Lee by finding a book, How To Write A Song, in his house. But the over-riding feeling is of Love as a talented, volatile group who achieved brilliance but soon became dysfunctional. And once heroin entered the picture there would be no happy ending.

Mike Barnes

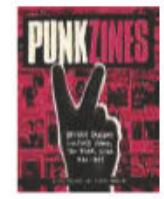
Punkzines: British Fanzine Culture From The Punk Scene 1976-1983

★★★★

Eddie Piller and Steve Rowland

OMNIBUS PRESS. £16.99

DJ modcasters explore a crucial period of UK fanzine culture, with rare artwork.



With their roots in guerrilla art and 1960s counter-culture mags like OZ and IT, early fanzines were, as John Robb says, "viral diaries and proto blogs" that fuelled punk's ecosystem. This book documents the time with front covers and spreads not just from legendary 'zines like Sniffin' Glue and Ripped & Torn, but also lesser-known titles such as Sheffield's Modern Drugs, edited by ABC vocalist Martin Fry, or Wendy May's Swansea-based Scratch. It includes great interview anecdotes too, like the time Sex Pistols' biographer Jon Savage photocopied Bondage (created by Shane O'Hooligan, AKA Shane MacGowan) in the solicitor's office where he worked: "I had to be careful because it had real razor blades and safety pins stuck on the pages!"

Lucy O'Brien

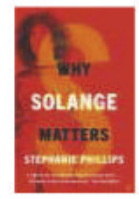
Why Solange Matters

★★★★

Stephanie Phillips

FABER & FABER. £9.99

Big Joanie lead singer/ guitarist writes eloquently in defence of Solange.



Celebrating her "black girl weirdo self", writer and musician Stephanie Phillips parallels her own story of teenage emo with the trajectory of Beyoncé's complicated younger sister. She explores how Solange moved away from the girly R&B of her 2002 debut album to situate herself in the dissolving boundaries between indie pop and neo soul, creating 2016's revolutionary black female album *A Seat At The Table*. Phillips writes with clarity about why Solange's work matters, exploring issues of cultural appropriation and black feminism along the way. Deftly combining quotes from mighty theorist Melissa Harris-Perry with some astute music journalism, Phillips links US Afropunk with her London Decolonise Fest, portraying a vivid picture of a diverse indie scene, as well as Solange's place in it as a maverick, flawed, but inspirational DIY queen.

Lucy O'Brien

Outside the margins: the pre-Madness Lee Thompson (left) with friend Debs, July 1975.

Jim Steinman: "I start at 'extreme' and go from there."

To Hell and Back

Jim Steinman, writer, producer and musical impresario, ascended to Rock Valhalla on April 19.

LONG, WITTY, bombastic, Jim Steinman songs existed on a separate plain to the rest of popular music. As grandiose as his hero Richard Wagner, but humanised by the omnipresent, elegiac tug of childhood (Peter Pan was his book of choice), they had jokes and choruses to spare. "I start at 'extreme' and go from there," explained Steinman. He wept when record companies cut his songs to maximise airplay.

Steinman was cagey but mischievous about his background and adult life in Ridgefield, Connecticut. He entwined such falsehoods as his first band being called The Clitoris That Thought It Was A Puppy, with more believable suggestions that his father, Louis, was big in steel distribution and his mother, Eleanor, was a Latin teacher. Verifiably true was Steinman's stint at prestigious liberal arts college, Amherst. In April 1969, the senior student wrote his first musical – and musicals were his true love – The Dream Engine. He met Meat Loaf in the early '70s and soon they began working on what, countless rejections later, became 1977's 50-million selling *Bat Out Of Hell*. The pair reunited sporadically, most recently on 2016's *Braver Than We Are*. "I may die this year because of Jim," said Meat Loaf on hearing of Steinman's passing. "I'm always with him and he's right here with me now… we didn't know each other, we were each other."

> "Bombastic? That's a fucking compliment."
> **JIM STEINMAN**

Steinman's brief solo career was torpedoed by his weak vocals, and he would be crushed by the failure of his wondrous 1989 rock creation Pandora's Box, but Bonnie Tyler, Barry Manilow, Andrew Eldritch, Celine Dion, Barbra Streisand and, especially, Meat Loaf threw themselves into a Steinman composition as if it was the last song they would sing.

In 1993, a few days before *Bat Out Of Hell II: Back Into Hell*'s release, this writer spent a fabulous day in Manhattan with him. It finished in the early hours at Le Bar Bat, where The Lord Of Excess ordered two of every starter and dessert for us. Like his music, he was a whirlwind of wonder: fiercely intelligent, gregarious and very funny. He rebuffed his critics ("Bombastic? That's a fucking compliment") and declared his finest line was Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad's "there ain't no Coup de Ville hiding at the bottom of a Cracker Jack box". Then he drove home, or, more accurately, was driven home. The man who said "the soul is just a car" never passed his driving test.

He died of kidney failure, aged 73, after a period of ill-health involving at least two strokes.

"He was funny, kind and lovely," said Tyler, whose 1983 smash Total Eclipse Of The Heart was classic Steinman. "It's an honour to say his name."

John Aizlewood

THE LEGACY

Album: Meat Loaf *Bat Out Of Hell* (Cleveland International, 1977)

The Sound: Overwrought, operatic, hook-laden and funny, this Todd Rundgren-produced album sounded like nothing else in popular music. It was also the template for songwriter Steinman's subsequent career, though it was only when he saw the sleeve that he realised it would be credited to Meat Loaf alone.

Photo by Terry Lott/Sony Music Archive via Getty Images

DMX

Hardcore rapper

BORN 1970

The first artist in Billboard history to top the charts with his first five albums, DMX's gruff authenticity and menacing microphone presence more than filled the hardcore void left by slain rappers The Notorious BIG and 2Pac.

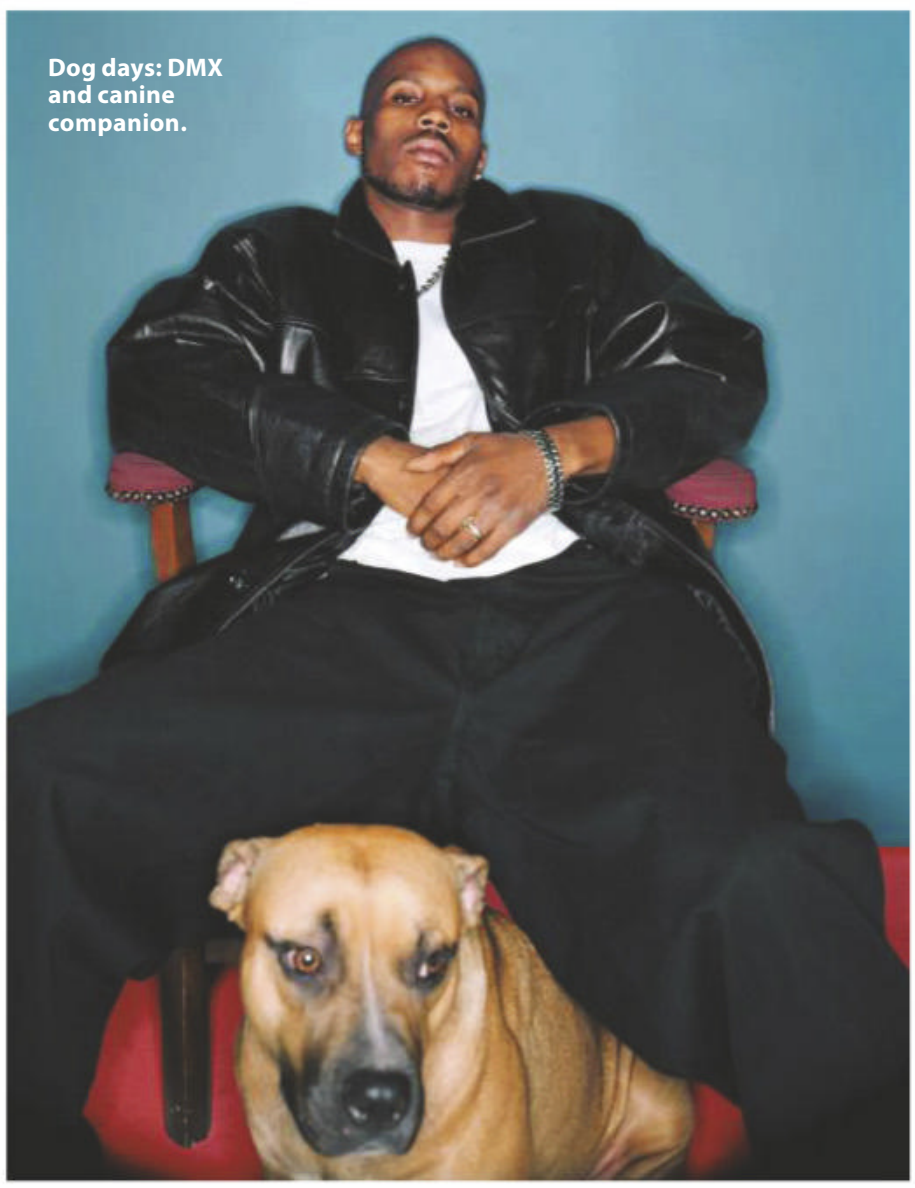
Raised in Yonkers, New York, the rapper born Earl Simmons overcame desperate poverty and horrific abuse at home by roaming the streets with the stray dogs he befriended. He found refuge in hip-hop, first as a DJ and human beatbox, before teaming with Brooklyn rapper Ready Ron to street-battle MCs.

Named after an Oberheim drum machine, he first broke cover in The Source magazine's Unsigned Hype column in 1991, doggedly working the margins until Def Jam launched him with cameos on singles by LL Cool J, Mase and The LOX in 1997. It built the hype to the following year's intense, theatrical, death-fixated debut *It's Dark And Hell Is Hot*, its bipolar creator caught in a graphic tug-of-war between heaven (The Prayer) and hell (Damien).

DMX continued to give voice to his deepest, darkest thoughts on the same year's growling and grimy *Flesh Of My Flesh, Blood Of My Blood*, parlaying his elevated status to big screen roles in Hype Williams' Belly and Steven Seagal's Exit Wounds.

After his platinum chart run was broken by 2006's *Year Of The Dog…Again*, his troubles rapidly mounted, a lifelong battle with hard drugs compounded by a $1.7million legal bill for unpaid taxes. Re-signed by Def Jam in 2019, his planned big budget return was cruelly stalled by a heart attack.

Andy Cowan



Dog days: DMX and canine companion.

Avalon.red, Getty (2), Courtesy valley-entertainment.com

Pat Rizzo

Family Stone sax

BORN 1941

Hired by Sly Stone in the early '70s to bring fresh energy to The Family Stone's horn section when the established sax player, Jerry Martini, started asking for better reward, Pat Rizzo recorded contributions to *Fresh*, released in 1973. He was in the line-up, with Martini, when Sly went back to the Harlem Apollo in New York in 1972: a fevered year to join the band, which was imploding in post-*There's A Riot Goin' On* craziness. Over that Thanksgiving weekend, they headlined Madison Square Garden, then flew across the States to feature at the Los Angeles Coliseum. In their LA hotel, Sly's bodyguards fought with Larry Graham's, while Rizzo hustled the Family Stone bassist down the back stairs to safety. On a happier note, Rizzo introduced drummer Andy Newmark to the band, and would contribute to later albums such as *Small Talk* in 1974 and 1980's *Ain't But The One Way*, for which he co-wrote Ha Ha, Hee Hee. In the later '70s, Rizzo also regularly played and recorded with Ry Cooder, replaced Charles Miller in War, and would play again with Sly on rare occasions he ventured out with his sister Vaetta 'Vet' Stewart.

Geoff Brown

Constance Demby amid celestial instruments.

Constance Demby

New Age composer

BORN 1939

Born in Oakland, the young Constance Demby played classical and jazz piano and studied art before moving to New York in 1960. In the mid-'60s she began exploring the sounds made by her vibrating metal sculptures: in 1970, playing hammered dulcimer among other instruments, she took her researches further when she co-founded experimental group the Central Maine Power Music Company with multimedia artist Robert Rutman. On the ensemble's disbandment in 1976, her study of yoga took her music into spiritually devotional areas, with 1978's solo debut *Skies Above Skies* employing celestial drones and passages from scripture. Other records followed, including 1982's *Sacred Space Music* and, with an increased use of synthesizers, 1986's magnum opus of cosmic transcendence, *Novus Magnificat: Through The Stargate*. Among her self-designed instruments was the Sonic Steel Space Bass, a 10-ft mirrored sheet of startling reverberating power. She continued recording into her seventies, having brought her 'Healing Music' to locations including Stonehenge and the Great Pyramid. "She was utterly magic," her nephew, writer Dave Eggers, told the San Francisco Chronicle. "If there is a heaven, she composed the soundtrack."

Ian Harrison

"DMX filled the void left by the slain Notorious BIG and 2Pac."

BB Dickerson

War's boss bass

BORN 1949

Born in Torrance, California, BB Dickerson became the bass foundation of War, the LA street- funk band whose savvy blend of soul, R&B, Latino and jazz was a permanent fixture in the US charts 1972-76, with much-sampled, radio-friendly hits including The Cisco Kid, The World Is A Ghetto, Slippin' Into Darkness and Low Rider. Dickerson had briefly been in The Creators, with founders Harold Brown (drums) and Howard Scott (guitar), who became Night Shift after Scott's military service. They signed with managers Jerry Goldstein and Steve Gold at Eric Burdon's recommendation. Renamed War, they backed the former Animals singer for two albums, peaking with a 1970 US Number 3 hit Spill The Wine. They were even more successful after Burdon quit in 1971, the aforementioned hits featuring on LPs such as *All Day Music, Deliver The Word* and *War Live*. But disputes with managers who owned the band's name saw them split. Dickerson left in 1979 and opened a 'head' shop in San Bernardino, but returned when they took the name The Lowrider Band, and played on, intermittently, his foregrounded bottom line still laced with supple syncopation.

Geoff Brown

Bay City Roller Les McKeown, wore his tartan legacy well.

Yesterday's Hero

Les McKeown, troubled idol of the Bay City Rollers, died on April 20.

"SINGING INTO a mike previously spattered with Marc Bolan's spittle was almost too much for my wee head to take," Les McKeown recalled in his 2003 memoir Shang-A-Lang: My Life With The Bay City Rollers. Having superseded original Rollers' singer 'Nobby' Clark in November 1973, McKeown was at London's Mayfair studios replacing Clark's lead vocal on Remember (Sha-La-La-La).

A UK Number 6, Remember was the first of four Rollers Top 10 hits in 1974. Phil Coulter and Bill Martin's crisp, '50's rock'n'roll-indebted song-writing was key and session players grounded debut long-player *Rollin'*, but McKeown's unaffected voice and easy smile undoubtedly boosted Rollermania, his relatable role in the band's teen melodramas like that of a male Shangri-La.

Born in Broomhouse, Edinburgh in 1955, McKeown almost died of meningitis aged nine. His dad Francis and mum Florence were rag trade workers and made costumes for Threshold, a band covering Deep Purple and Free which McKeown quit school to join aged 15. Threshold made decent money, so joining the Rollers on £10 a week was a big pay-cut.

> "It was almost too much for my wee head to take."
> LES MCKEOWN

More street-wise than his bandmates, McKeown quickly grasped the gulf between the Rollers' joyful, escapist songs and the dark, abusive underbelly of '70s pop. Early single Keep On Dancing was produced by Jonathan King, and their label Bell Records also housed Gary Glitter.

But it was the group's manipulative and predatory manager Tam Paton who McKeown sparred with daily. "I was the gobby one who had the balls to defend himself," he recalled.

Les was happiest in the Rollers circa 1975's *Once Upon A Star* LP, wherein producer Phil Wainman allowed the band to play their own instruments. But the album's success – and that of the band's 4.20pm on Tuesdays Granada TV series Shang-A-Lang – were overshadowed by the defining, alcoholism-inducing tragedy of McKeown's early life: In May 1975, he accidentally ran over and killed elderly Edinburgh neighbour Euphemia Clunie, and was convicted of reckless driving.

Punk and a decline in quality material did for the Rollers here, but US Number 1 Saturday Night sparked great success there in '76 and '77. McKeown left a warring, ailing Rollers in 1978, and his solo debut *All Washed Up* was a Japanese Number 1 in 1979. Eight more solo albums followed, and he periodically reconvened with BCR, but in the '90s and beyond McKeown was reduced to MC Hammer spoof Ye Cannae Touch This and the '70s nostalgia circuit.

McKeown died at home on April 20, aged 65, and is survived by his Japanese wife Peko Keiko and their son Jubei. Though he could never escape the Bay City Rollers' tartan-clad legacy, Les wore it well: Shang-A-Lang, he joked, "was actually an old Gaelic battle cry first used by Robert The Bruce."

James McNair

THE LEGACY

The Album(s): *Rollin'* (Bell, 1974); *Once Upon A Star* (Bell, 1975).

The Sound: Buoyant,'50s-influenced pop tooled for teenage heartbreak. Nonsense lyrics a speciality. *Rollin'* knocked Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* off the top spot; *OUAS*'s Bye Bye Baby had tubular bells of its own.

Getty

Lew Lewis

Canvey blues harp

BORN 1955

Lew Lewis was one of the UK's finest exponents of blues harmonica. Born Keith William Lewis in Essex, he became part of the Canvey Island scene, playing in teenage jug bands alongside future Feelgoods John Sparkes and Lee Brilleaux. In 1974 he joined Eddie And The Hot Rods but was fired after an on-stage altercation. Undeterred, he made solo recordings for Stiff Records and wrote Lucky Seven for Dr. Feelgood. With his band Lew Lewis Reformer, he released 1979's *Save The Wail* and toured Europe, combining up-tempo R&B with on-stage gymnastics. His personal life was often in turmoil largely due to the mental health issues which led to a prison sentence for armed robbery in 1987, but he continued to perform.

He also guested on numerous artists' records. As Kosmo Vinyl says: "When I asked him to play on The Clash's *Sandinista!* he thought I was joking but he was the real deal – Little Walter reincarnated."

Will Birch

Shock G

P-funk flame-keeper

BORN 1963

Shock G kept the funk flag flying. The alias of Brooklyn everyman Gregory Jacobs, he formed Digital Underground after moving to Oakland in the late '80s. One of hip-hop's first genuine bands, they sailed against the prevailing gangsta rap wind, leaning heavily on Parliament and Funkadelic for 1990's party-oriented debut *Sex Packets*. It introduced his show-stealing, lascivious alter-ego Humpty Hump, a nasal rapper in Groucho Marx glasses whose Sly Stone-sampling signature The Humpty Dance became a hit.

Declared "Sons of the P" by George Clinton, 1991's Same Song first put their dancer Tupac Shakur on wax. Jacobs later produced two tracks on Tupac's 1991 debut *2Pacalypse Now,* and worked with Murs, Luniz and KRS-One. His talents shone through on a lone solo LP, 2004's *Fear Of A Mixed Planet*, an eclectic, politically acute and highly personal lost classic.

Andy Cowan

Shock G: plenty funk in his trunk.

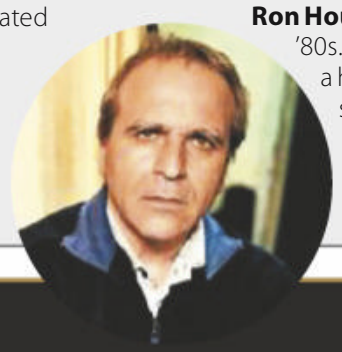
THEY ALSO SERVED

DEEJAY **TRINITY** (below, b.Wade Brammer, 1954) took his name from the hero of two popular Italian comedy western movies. After working the Kingston soundsystems, he recorded singles from 1974, and broke through with his 1977 reggae hit Three Piece Suit. With its references to bedsprings and diamond rings, it paved the way for dancehall, though Althea & Donna's similar-sounding Uptown Top Ranking was the bigger chart success. Trinity recorded regularly into the '80s, released vocal material as **Junior Brammer**, and later appeared at revival shows. His brother was deejay **Clint Eastwood**.

GUITARIST and keyboardist **DENNY FREEMAN** (b.1944) moved from Dallas to Austin, Texas in 1970. He was soon playing the blues with **The Cobras**. Another of that group's guitarists was **Stevie Ray Vaughan**: over the ensuing years, Freeman would play with Vaughan and his brother Jimmy, as well as **WC Clark**, **James Cotton**, **Albert Collins**, **Otis Rush** and **Junior Wells**. In the '90s he joined **Taj Mahal**'s **Phantom Blues Band**, and from 2005 to 2009, **Bob Dylan**, appearing on 2006's *Modern Times*. He also collaborated with **Percy Sledge**, **Blondie** and **Doyle Bramhall**; his solo albums included *Twang Bang* and *A Tone For My Sins*.

SAXOPHONIST and cor anglais player **SONNY SIMMONS** (b.1933) released 1963's *The Cry!* and '68's *Firebirds* with flautist **Prince Lasha**. Spoken of as highly as Ornette Coleman, Simmons played with **Eric Dolphy**, **Sonny Rollins**, and on his 1966 ESP-Disk debut *Staying On The Watch*, trumpeter **Barbara Donald**, whom he married. The 1970s brought divorce, depression and homelessness. He was rediscovered busking in the '90s. His prolific second act included over 20 albums as bandleader and collaborations with **Horace Tapscott**, **Anthony Braxton** and the **Cosmosamatics** quartet.

PRODUCER and musician **RODION ROSCA** (below, b.1953) founded the group **Rodion G.A.** in Cluj, Romania, in 1977. In revolutionary defiance of the communist dictatorship, he mixed tape experimentation, drum machines and ad hoc keyboards with rock. Unable to release records, the group played live and made radio and TV appearances but fell dormant in 1989. His first international LP release was 2013's *The Lost Tapes*: Live dates and further archival collections followed. Last year he collaborated with **Mark Stewart** and others in a fundraiser for French avant-garde broadcaster Radio Mulot.



KEYBOARDIST **RALPH SCHUCKETT** (b.1948) was described by **Carole King** as "a very talented cat". As well as the first three King albums, his early credits include **The Monkees**' Porpoise Song and **David Blue**'s 1966 Elektra debut. In 1973 he joined **Todd Rundgren** for *A Wizard, A True Star*, *Todd* and *Initiation*, becoming a member of Rundgren's **Utopia** until 1975. He later worked in production and A&R before turning to TV and film scores, including Pokémon.

ATTORNEY/"dope lawyer" **BRIAN ROHAN** (b.1936) defended numerous '60s counterculture figures including **Ken Kesey** and the **Grateful Dead**, whom he got off drugs charges following a 1967 raid in San Francisco. As a music lawyer, Rohan negotiated the Dead's 1966 contract with Warners, and represented acts from **Janis Joplin** to **Motörhead**. Herb Caen, columnist for the SF Chronicle, reported that Rohan punched David Geffen at a 1977 Grammy Awards party and was applauded by onlookers including Paul Simon, Linda Ronstadt and Leonard Cohen.

COLUMBUS, Ohio guitarist **BOB PETRIC** (b.1964) formed **Thomas Jefferson Slave Apartments** with former **Great Plains** singer **Ron House** in the late '80s. Following a handful of singles, the band's '95 debut album, *Bait And Switch* was released on Rick Rubin's Onion Records. They released two further albums for Rockathon Records, the label run by Robert Pollard from Dayton, Ohio neighbours Guided By Voices, with whom they also toured. Petric also played with **Girly Machine**.

PRODUCER **ETHEL GABRIEL** (below, b.1921) played trombone and started a dance band aged just 13. While studying music she began working for RCA Victor as a part-time record-packer in New Jersey. Self-motivated and capable, she later became the first major label female producer and, from 1959, made the budget Camden label a success with easy listening albums such as the Living Strings series and bargain covers sets, overseeing big-sellers for **Roger Whittaker** and **Perry Como**. After she retired from RCA in 1984, she was defrauded by the infamous ex-US Treasury Secretary Robert B. Anderson.

SONGWRITER, guitarist and producer **QUINTON CLAUNCH** (b.1921) formed Alabama opry alumni **The Blue Seal Pals** in 1943. Moving to Memphis, he played on sessions for **Charlie Feathers**, **Carl Perkins** and **Wanda Jackson** for his friend Sam Phillips' Sun label. Claunch co-founded Hi Records in 1957, and in 1964 he co-founded soul label Goldwax, producing and composing for **James Carr** and **Spencer Wiggins** among others. His songs were covered by **Wanda Jackson**, **Percy Sledge**, **The Beatles**, and more.

WEST COAST singer-songwriter **RUSTY YOUNG** (b.1946) played pedal steel on **Buffalo Springfield**'s *Last Time Around* in 1967. The same year he and Richie Furay formed **Poco** with **George Grantham** and **Jim Messina**, setting the template for the Eagles with sweet vocal harmonies, laidback sound and well-crafted songs such as Young's Rose Of Cimarron and Number 1 hit Crazy Love. In 2017 Young released his solo debut, *Waitin' For The Sun*, the same year as Poco's 50th anniversary reunion.

WIGAN-born songwriter **BARRY MASON** (b.1935) spent time in Columbus, Ohio as a young man. Back in the UK from 1960, he wrote for **Jimmy Page** and **The Merseybeats**, and hit his stride from 1967, often in the company of co-writer **Les Reed**, penning hits including **Tom Jones**' Delilah, **Engelbert Humperdinck**'s The Last Waltz, **Edison Lighthouse**'s Love Grows (Where My Rosemary Goes), plus others for **Elvis**, **Charles Aznavour**, **Rod Stewart**, and more. Mason also co-wrote Leeds United's Marching On Together (Leeds! Leeds! Leeds!) in 1972.

Jenny Bulley and Ian Harrison

George Chin/IconicPix, Tim Barrow/urbanimage.tv, Getty Caroline Losneck and Christoph Gelfand/Living Sound documentary, courtesy BBE Music

The Arthurian Candidate: (clockwise from main) Bryan Ferry relaxes in The Hague, May 28, 1982; Roxy on TV with Martha Ladly (second left); Avalon and More Than This 45 sleeves; 1975's *Siren* LP; *Avalon* album cover shot at Lough Ugga Beg; Ferry marries Lucy Helmore.

JUNE 1982

...Roxy Music retire to Avalon

JUNE 5 With their eighth album, *Avalon*, Roxy Music were at Number 1 on the LP charts once more. But habitués attuned to the group's imaginative world of glamour and luxuriousness could tell something was different. Where was the traditional *femme fatale* that had graced their album sleeves since 1972's self-titled debut?

Instead, *Avalon*'s sleeve featured an armoured figure seen from behind, gazing out over an expanse of water, seemingly at twilight. This was the Avalon of Arthurian legend – the island where the mythical King's sword Excalibur was forged, and where he was taken after his final battle, one day to return.

"[Avalon] is the Isle of Enchantment," Roxy mainman Bryan Ferry told the LA Weekly's Don Waller in November 1982. "A fantasy place, a very romantic place… I thought this was the most romantic, dream-like album I'd ever done. I started working on the songs for *Avalon* on the west coast of Ireland, on the very lake that's used in the photograph on the album cover."

Ferry had been visiting that area of County Galway with his partner Lucy Helmore since 1980, staying at her family's waterside home Crumlin Lodge near Inverin. Duly inspired, Ferry art-directed the cover image of fashion model Helmore looking out onto Lough Ugga Beg, in a horned helmet with a hooded merlin bird of prey on her wrist. Photographed at dawn by Neil Kirk, the image suggested a mature analogue to 1975's *Siren*, which featured Ferry's then-muse Jerry Hall posed with winged feet on volcanic rocks off the coast of Anglesey.

Work on the album had begun in mid-1981 at guitarist Phil Manzanera's studio in Surrey, with Rhett Davies producing. They continued at Compass Point in the Bahamas and finished the vocals and drum parts at New York's Power Station with engineer Bob Clearmountain in early 1982. Ferry's lyrics were completed just prior to his singing them, while the album's title track was completely re-recorded as mixing drew to a close. That Sunday, Ferry and Davies heard Haitian singer Yanick Etienne demo'ing in the studio next door. "Bryan and I just looked at each other and went, 'What a fantastic voice!'" Davies told Sound On Sound in 2003. "[She] sang all the high stuff on Avalon. She didn't speak a word of English. Her boyfriend… came in and translated."

> **"Making music, all kinds of angst seems to appear out of thin air."**
> **BRYAN FERRY**

Sophisticated, wreathed in mist and strangely faultless, the album was built for mass appeal. Lead single More Than This had already reached Number 6 in April, and on June 7 *Avalon*'s perfect title song, with its telling lines "Now the party's over, I'm so tired", was released. With a grandiose video filmed at Mentmore Towers in Buckinghamshire – the hooded merlin from the album sleeve made an appearance – the band played the song live on June 17's Top Of The Pops with a masked Martha Ladly of ex-Roxy support band Martha And The Muffins on backing vocals and former Cure/Associates man Michael Dempsey on bass. It peaked at Number 13 the following week.

"Making *Avalon* was interesting in that, for a change, I wasn't going through much," Ferry told Neil Spencer in the NME's June 9 edition. "But I've found that although you might think that your day-to-day life is fine and there's no great trauma going on, as soon as you start making music, all kinds of angst seems to appear out of thin air… asking what's the meaning of life: why am I doing this?"

He had other important matters to attend

to. On June 26, Ferry and Helmore, who was pregnant with their son Otis, were married in West Sussex. As well as matrimony and fatherhood, Ferry admitted to other concerns. "*Avalon* was a real sweat to make," he told Jon Savage in MOJO in 1994. "I was getting impatient with the rest of the band, getting impatient about what they could or could not play."

Ferry's solo career was calling, and Roxy were on borrowed time. The group began rehearsals in July for a UK tour, whose programme declared them "that strange hybrid: the truly cosmopolitan rock-pop-art group." They followed with farewell visits to Japan and the US, where *Avalon* peaked at 53 (it eventually stealth-sold a million). On May 28, 1983, at Philadelphia's Tower Theatre, the group played their last date before disbanding.

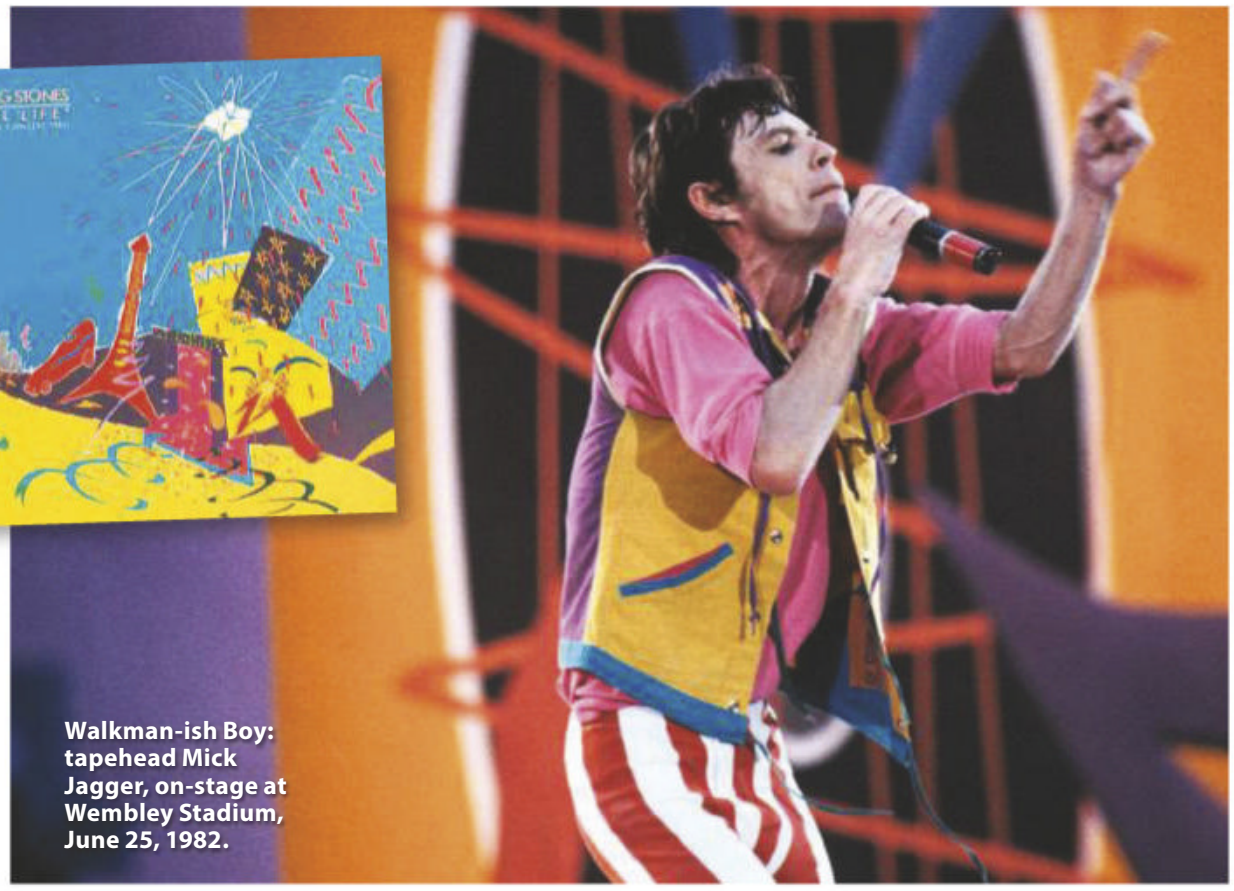
When Roxy Music rose again 18 years later, *Avalon* was prominent in their setlists. An always memorable moment was Andy Mackay's beauteous soprano sax piece Tara, which originally featured sea-sounds straight from *Avalon*'s haunting cover image. Speaking to Radio 2 in 2011, Mackay wondered if the band "could have gone that bit further. *Avalon*, we didn't think it was our last album, at least I didn't, but, you know… 'and now the party's over' is a good way of putting it."

Ian Harrison

Crazy casbah sounds: The Clash go to war.

The Clash storm the US

JUNE 11 **Rock The Casbah, the second single from The Clash's *Combat Rock* long-player, is released. The band are currently on tour in California, preparing to play dates with The English Beat. They're regrouping after a period of turmoil: in April, frontman Joe Strummer went AWOL in Paris (one rumour said he'd gone there to have gender reassignment surgery) causing a UK tour to be cancelled. In May, drummer Topper Headon, debilitated by heroin, was replaced by returning sticksman Terry Chimes. On June 8 and 9 Don Letts films a video for the single, which condemns rock'n'roll being censored by theocratic regimes, in Austin, Texas. Rock The Casbah will hit its peak at Number 8 on the US Hot 100 in January 1983.**


Walkman-ish Boy: tapehead Mick Jagger, on-stage at Wembley Stadium, June 25, 1982.

STONES BRING EURO-TOUR RUCKUS

JUNE 2 Releasing the live *Still Life* LP the day before, The Rolling Stones' European tour kicks off at Rotterdam's Feyenoord Stadion, with balloons, fireworks and support slots from George Thorogood & The Destroyers and The J. Geils Band. There is, however, industry upset that the tour's sponsors are blank tape manufacturers TDK. The German branch of music biz trade body the IFPI issue a statement calling it "a betrayal", adding, "these artists… are cooperating with the gravediggers of the music business." Industry figures including Quincy Jones are also agitating for a cassette levy to offset losses from home taping. July 25's date at Leeds' Roundhay Park is the Stones' last public show for seven years and their final performance with keyboardist Ian Stewart.

Getty (5), Advertising Archives, Paul Slattery/Avalon

ALSO ON!

KEYNES SPIRIT

5 **Queen** (above) play to 65,000 fans at the Milton Keynes Bowl. Support acts are **Joan Jett, Heart** and **The Teardrop Explodes**, whose singer Julian Cope admits, "we were bottled mercilessly."

LASER RECORDS?

6 New format the compact disc is unveiled by PolyGram in Chicago. "The world's first laser-read digital record will be revealed," reads the blurb. "HEAR THE LIGHT there & then."

UNMELLOW JELLO

12 It's reported that Los Angeles studio musicians the **Sound Of Sunshine** are suing the **Dead Kennedys**' label for $1 million for using their image on the rear sleeve of 1980's *Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables*, saying the LP is "morally repugnant".

HONEYMAN-SCOTT DIES

16 **Pretenders** guitarist **James Honeyman-Scott** dies in London from heart failure caused by cocaine intolerance. Two days earlier, their bassist **Pete Farndon** had been dismissed for drug-related unreliability.

BARK MATTER

26 **Bow Wow Wow**'s cover of **The Strangeloves**' I Want Candy peaks in the UK at 9. Initially sold as a one-sided 7-inch for 99p, a B-side, King Kong, is soon added. The death of the single-sided format is not mourned by manager **Malcolm McLaren**.

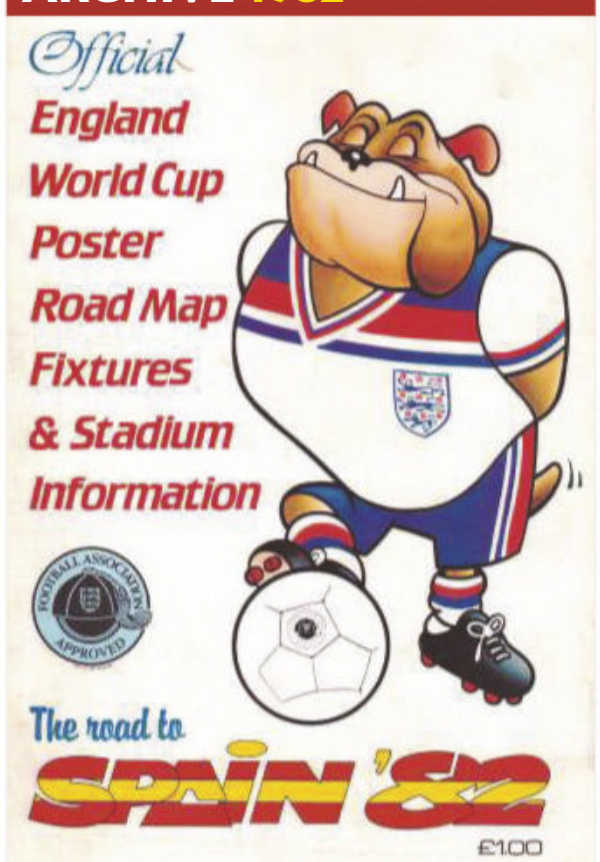
TOP TEN

ISRAEL SINGLES JUNE 4

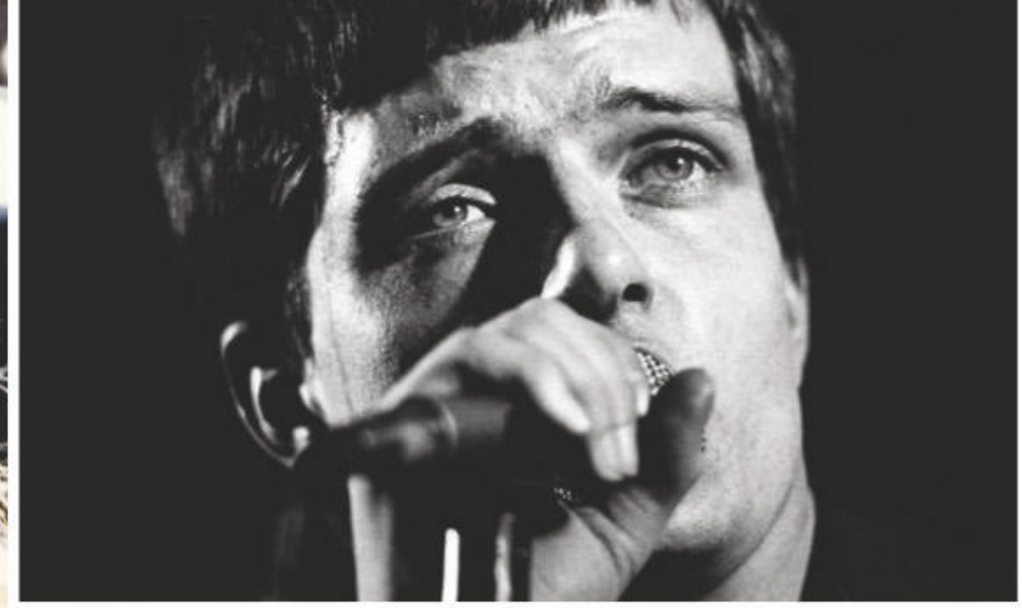
1. **A LITTLE PEACE** NICOLE CBS
2. **BLUE EYES** ELTON JOHN ROCKET
3. **NIGHT BIRDS** SHAKATAK POLYDOR
4. **SHIRLEY** SHAKIN' STEVENS EPIC
5. **EVER SO LONELY** MONSOON MERCURY
6. **I'VE NEVER BEEN TO ME** CHARLENE MOTOWN
7. **EBONY AND IVORY** PAUL McCARTNEY AND STEVIE WONDER PARLOPHONE
8. **ONE STEP FURTHER** BARDO EPIC
9. **BODY LANGUAGE** QUEEN EMI
10. **WE HAVE A DREAM** THE SCOTTISH WORLD CUP SQUAD WEA

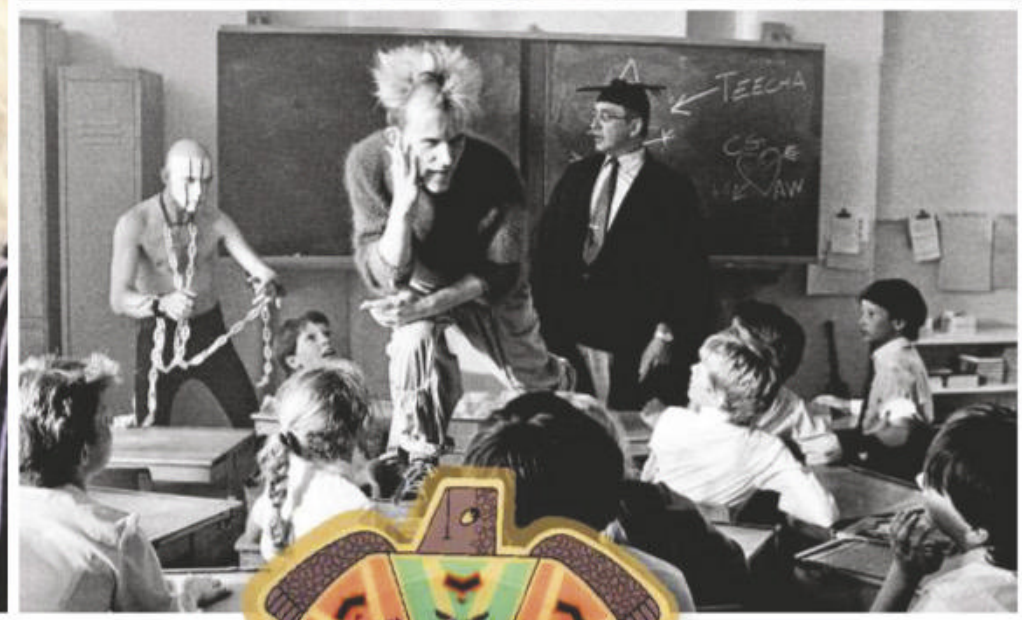
Precipitation Under A Groove: Sheila Chandra of Monsoon at 5.

ARCHIVE 1982



The World Cup kicks off on June 11. England last five games, despite the promise of May's Number 2 45 This Time (We'll Get It Right). Erm…





Start your vidding now: (clockwise from left) Blondie's Debbie Harry smiles for the camera; Joy Division's Ian Curtis; Howard Jones (centre) and friends, throwing off their mental chains; a bronzed Art Of Noise picture disc; Bowie 'n' Ronno.

Who made the first video album?

Let us dig into rock'n'roll's deep stratus and solve the niggling pop queries that keep you from sleep.

I got round to watching the 'video album' for Blondie's 1979 LP *Eat To The Beat*, where each song gets its own film clip. I know other examples exist, *The Wall* spings to mind, but who set the ball, or the film, rolling on the concept? Concert movies or promo video collections not allowed.

Kevin Thorpe, via e-mail

MOJO says: Things got busy in the late '70s when video cassettes and laserdiscs were the music industry's next big idea. *Eat To The Beat* was in on the act early, as was the all-video version of ELO's *Discovery*, while the early '80s saw Mike Nesmith's *Elephant Parts*, Olivia Newton-John's *Physical* and Pete Townshend's *All The Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes* (well, seven tracks' worth) and others follow suit. The first example of a set of songs being visually realised in their entirety was, we would argue, The Beatles' 1967 Magical Mystery Tour film and EP, followed by John and Yoko's 1972 TV movie Imagine, when Lennon's second LP was reinterpreted in freewheeling style with walk-on parts for Fred Astaire, George Harrison and Andy Warhol. The format didn't really catch on for full albums, but from the '80s plenty more audio-visual hybrids followed, including The Special AKA's *In The Studio/ On Film*, Super Furry Animals' *Rings Around The World* and Daft Punk's *Interstella 5555*. One still-startling example of the genre, though, is the extraordinary film version of The The's 1986 long-player *Infected* – a reissue is long overdue.

DID HOWARD JONES SUPPORT JOY DIVISION?

The poster for Joy Division's gig at High Wycombe Town Hall on February 20, 1980 lists the 'Jones Boys' as one of the support acts. The only famous musician from the Buckinghamshire town I know of is Howard Jones, whose brother Martin played bass in his live band during his commercial peak. Is it possible that the 1980's synth-popstar once supported Joy Division?

John Deol, via e-mail

MOJO says: Sadly not. Punks The Jones Boys were Howard's younger brothers Roy, Martin and Paul, who with their bassist pal Majid Ahmed were also known as After Science and Red Beat. But – and thanks to Paul Lewis's splendid site wycombegigs.co.uk for the info – singer Roy confirmed that Howard only got on-stage with his siblings once, at Wycombe's Nags Head pub in 1979.

Coincidentally, Roy had been in prog band Beowulf with 'Big' Paul Ferguson of Killing Joke, whose Jaz Coleman and Geordie Walker later collaborated with Joy Division's Peter Hook on the K÷93 EP. The High Wycombe gig and its soundcheck, meanwhile, got an official release on the 2007 Collector's Edition of Joy Division's *Still*.

WHO WAS ZIGGY'S PIANIST

I was watching a recording of David Bowie's classic TOTP Starman performance, the Spiders are all there, as well as someone playing keyboards. Who is this mysterious addition to the line up? (And) Re: Impossible pairings (Ask MOJO 330). I heard that after Roger Waters left, Pink Floyd sought Colin Moulding (XTC) as a replacement. True or false?

Paul Brooks, via e-mail

MOJO says: On the keys for Starman, Robin Lumley, who was engaged when Matthew Fisher was indisposed. He later played in jazz fusionists Brand X alongside Phil Collins and is also second cousin of screen great Joanna Lumley. And yes, Pink Floyd did want Colin Moulding in the '80s – his old bandmate Andy Partridge has confirmed that Floyd guitarist Dave Gilmour drove to Moulding's house and asked him, but Colin turned him down.

CD ROT REVISITED!

Re: CD rot and some discs turning copper coloured (Ask MOJO 330). I'm a bit obsessive about collecting reviews for records and folding them neatly into record covers. Great to look back at when playing an album and real time capsules. The problem arose once CDs arrived – I'd fold them ever smaller to fit the jewel boxes. Several years later I noticed that some CDs no longer played and had changed colour. I freaked out and went through the collection taking newsprint articles out. I assumed some chemically destructive reaction had taken place between the newsprint ink and the CD… I'm delighted to see that CD rot is actually a 'thing'.

Angus Self, Edinburgh

MOJO says: Glad to put your mind at rest Angus! Though reader Derek Lock also mailed about his experience of picture disc rot, when his tortoise-shaped 45 of Art Of Noise's Moments In Love emerged severely tanned after years in a cupboard. Will we ever be set free?

HELP MOJO

I recently read that Sigue Sigue Sputnik were nearly called Sperm Festival and Nazi Occult Bureau. It made me think of Joe Brown refusing Larry Parnes' suggestion he call himself Elmer Twitch and the early Steely Dan formation known as the Leather Canary. What are the other band names rightfully left on the drawing board?

Christopher Molyneux, via e-mail

CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.

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Moog On Up!

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THIS MONTH, the legendary synthesizer company Moog Music is giving MOJO readers a chance to win a Moog Sound Studio music creation package, worth $1,399!

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So get Thee Supreme Guv'nor Fred Dellar's crossword completed and send a scan of it to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk, making sure to type CROSSWORD 332 in the subject line. Entries without that subject line will not be considered. Please include your home address, e-mail and phone number. The closing date for entries is **July 2**. For the rules of the quiz, see www.mojo4music.com

Hear Julianna Barwick, Bonobo, Dan Deacon and others use the kit on Explorations In Analog Synthesis at: tinyurl.com/4ayukse7

www.moogmusic.com

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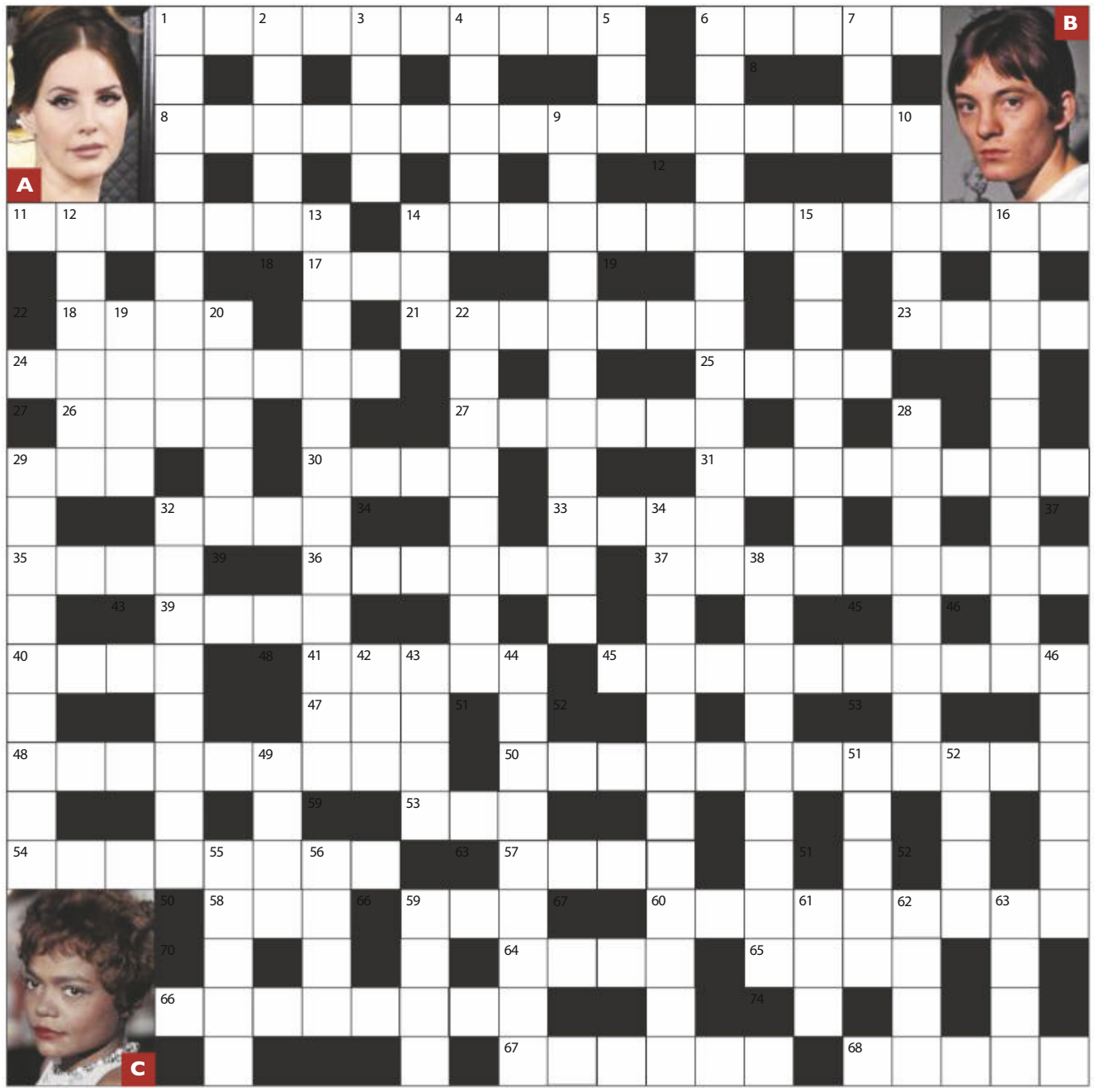

Getty (2), Alamy

ANSWERS

MOJO 330

Across: 1 Dave Grohl, 6 Victim, 9 Early Morning Rain, 10 Political, 12 Cleo, 13 Son Volt, 16 El Paso, 17 Albert Ammons, 18 Legs, 19 Billy, 20 Hayes, 23 Arena, 26 Motion, 27 Stand By Your Man, 29 Ott, 32 Stereo, 33 Jesus And Mary Chain, 35 India, 36 Piano, 38 Eli, 39 Pea, 40 Them, 41 Lifeboat, 44 Maestro, 45 Ann, 46 Steamer, 48 Yanks, 49 On A Slow, 52 Kemp, 53 Epic, 54 Animal, 55 Below, 56 Unruly, 57 Hays, 58 Swerve.

Down: 1 Daevid Allen, 2 Vertigo, 3 Guy Garvey, 4 Oboe, 5 Lonely Boy, 6 Van Morrison, 7 Chris Martin, 8 I Didn't Mean It, 11 Only By The Night, 14 Last Nite, 15 Cash, 21 Air, 22 Emancipation, 24 Hymn To Her, 25 Tommy Emmanuel, 28 Disco, 29 Orbison, 30 Tom, 31 Savaloy, 32 Sniffin' Glue, 34 Raiders, 37 Nazareth, 42 Baskery, 43 Animals, 47 Emily, 50 Laws, 51 Wire.

Winners: Jackie Norris of Ipswich, **Ron Unwin** of Gillingham, **Jo Knights** of Sheffield, **Neil Mejury** of Co Down, and **Richard Bolton** of Bacup all win Meze Audio Rai Solo in-ear headphones.

ACROSS

1 See photoclue A (4,3,3)
6/24 See photoclue B (5,8)
8 Buffy Sainte-Marie's worldly warrior (9,7)
11 Supertramp's first major hit (7)
14 As served by Dusty in 1969 (9,2,3)
17 Their one album was *Supernatural Fairy Tales* (3)
18 True Love ---- (Buddy Holly) (4)
21 "Oh no, here I go again" (Fleetwood Mac) (2,5)
23 Scruggs or possibly Sweatshirt (4)
24 See 6
25 Marilyn called yours in 1983 (4)
26 There was one going on for Sly & The Family Stone (4)
27 New Order's sense of disappointment (6)
29 She's a Zydeco Queen (3)
30 Their debut LP was *Beautiful Freak* (4)
31 -------- Carpets (8)
32 ---- Code 615 provided that Stone Fox Chase (4)
33 Martin or Parks maybe (4)
35 US band headed by Andrew VanWyngarden (1.1.1.1.)
36 Is it you? Chuck Berry asked her (6)
37 Ian Gillan was vocalist on this Black Sabbath album (4,5)
39 Elusive Butterfly hit-maker Bob (4)
40 As the clown said to Manfred Mann (2,2)
41 Kristin from Throwing Muses (5)
45 Kinks song covered by The Jam (5,5)
47 Midge, Bob Geldof's Band Aid co-organiser (3)
48 Sonny and Cher's 'minor' hit (6,3)
50 He was once part of The Guess Who (5,7)
53 Nugent or possibly Templeman (3)
54 Jethro Tull's 1974 album (8)
57 Melody (4)
58 He was coming for Three Dog Night (3)
59 I Spy For The --- (Jamo Thomas) (1.1.1)
60/68 Ramsey Lewis' H2O advice (4,2,3,5)
64 They brought you The Sound Of Philadelphia (1.1.1.1.)
65 Hate For ---- (Pretenders album) (4)
66 Bob James and Earl Klugh 1979 jazz-funk album (3,2,3)
67 Mendes of Brasil 66 fame (6)
68 See 60

DOWN

1 She once had Wedding Bell Blues (5,4)
2 A Cellarful Of ----- (Brian Epstein book) (5)
3 Dubliner Ronnie (4)
4 T.Rex's kind of beamed love (5)
5 Took you *Close To The Edge* in 1972 (3)
6 He was once lead singer with The Beau Brummels (3,9)
7 Bobby, hailed by Dylan as "a beautiful person" (3)
9 Carolina Chocolate Drops' album (7,4)
10 Bruce Hornsby And The ----- (5)
12 Cate Le Bon's 2019 album (6)
13 The sound of a U2 rockumentary and album (6,3,3)
14 Initially this band was fronted by 50 across (1.1.1.)
15 Richard, Linda or Teddy (8)
16 See photoclue C (6,4)
19 Classical song (4)
20 Stringed instrument (5)
22 Band regarded as the fathers of Celtic rock (8)
28 Bob Dylan's 1985 box-set (8)
29 Anthrax's tribute to Judge Dredd (1,2,3,3)
32 Record label founded by Herb Abramson and Ahmet Ertegun (8)
34 Obtained by James Brown's papa apparently (1,5,3,3)
38 German band fronted by singer Katharina Franck (9)
42 --- *Vulgaris* (Queens Of The Stone Age album) (3)
43 "You dress me up, I'm your puppet" (Pet Shop Boys) (4)
44 Paramore's low point release? (4,5)
46 Not an album or EP (6)
49 ---- Ways (Santana) (4)
51 Free jazz pianist Taylor (5)
52 ---- El Presidente (Duran Duran) (4)
55 His biggest hit was Just Like Eddie (5)
56 Foo Fighters' white jalopy (4)
59 ---- If You Think It's Over (Chris Rea) (4)
61 *The End Of An* --- (Robert Wyatt LP) (3)
62 She sailed into the charts thanks to 99 Red Balloons (4)
63 Band founded by Courtney Love and Eric Erlandson (4)

Young hearts run twee: early Talulah Gosh (from left) Matthew Fletcher, Elizabeth 'Pebbles' Price, Amelia 'Marigold' Fletcher, Peter Momtchiloff, Chris Scott.

Amelia Fletcher and Talulah Gosh

They began when shambling indie reigned. But house music and other people's songs put a stop to the fun.

HELLO NOVEMBER 1985

I was part of the scene that was happening in London, going to all the gigs even though I lived in Oxford. I was a big fan of the Soup Dragons and The Pastels and Primal Scream, and everything on Creation. Part of what was really good about it was that it felt possible, and not very hard, to do what they did. They seemed to be getting by pretty well with attitude and passion. I guess I just wanted to be a part of it, and to write perfect pop songs with a very personal quality.

I cajoled my boyfriend Pete [Momtchiloff, guitar], and my brother Matthew [drums] to be in my band, but I really wanted more females. I couldn't find *anyone* in Oxford, and I eventually walked up to this girl [Elizabeth Price] at a Here Comes Everybody gig at Jesus College [on November 22, 1985] because she was wearing a Pastels badge. She said, "Well I can't play anything, but my boyfriend's just given me a guitar, so why not?" When we asked around for a bass player, a friend of a friend suggested a guy called Rob [Pursey], and me and Elizabeth went to his house, looked at his posters and his records and said, "You'll do." [Reader, she married him, and currently plays with him in The Catenary Wires].

Sometimes we practised at my parents' home, and there was a practice room close to Elizabeth's bedroom in Jesus College. We made a horrible racket and one day we found a note outside the door saying, "You Are Really, Really Terrible, Please Don't Practise Here Again", ha ha! I think we were pathetic and thought, Oh, we better not then.

It did happen remarkably fast. I'd already written a few songs, Elizabeth just picked up a guitar and wrote amazing songs, and in a very short space of time we got offered a gig supporting The Razorcuts, Elizabeth's boyfriend's band, in Oxford [on March 7, 1986]. Loads of people on the scene came up from London and Bristol. I remember being absolutely terrified, and we were pretty ramshackle, but I guess the audience got what we were trying to do and from that moment it grew really fast. We got a gig in Bristol, then London, and then we were on page three of the NME!

GOODBYE FEBRUARY 1988

Very early on, playing to people in our scene, the term was "shambling". It meant, we don't put a premium on being able to play, we put a premium on ideas. But as the press pushed us, we played bigger gigs to people who weren't so understanding, and we got quite a bit of heckling. The term "twee" was created and we started getting slagged off in the music press. Some people bought into a certain macho aesthetic, and I think we were undermining that, I suppose.

It was part of a whole set of things, though. I had it in my head that you shouldn't be in band after you were 21. I was in my third year of university and had to concentrate on my exams, a very boring reason… another thing was everyone was more prolific than me, and I felt quite uncomfortable singing their songs. It was too democratic. Another thing was, in 1988 everybody who had been into indie was suddenly into house music. It looked like this thing I'd loved was coming to an end, and I didn't want to be plugging away at some kind of *old* music. So I thought, Stop.

The worst thing that I did, and I still don't quite forgive myself for this, was I organised a final gig at the London School of Economics [on February 5, 1988], but I hadn't told the rest of the band! I must've told Pete, because he was my boyfriend, but there was never the right moment, and they saw it in the press beforehand. I think Chris [Scott, bass] and Eithne [Farry, vocals] were fine, but I do remember my brother being very unhappy with me, which was fair enough! It was a great gig, absolutely, brilliant fun. There were more people on-stage than in the audience by the end. The last thing was probably Testcard Girl, a great racket to end on.

I was determined I wasn't going to do a band again, but Rob and Pete started one without me. I was incredibly jealous. That's when Heavenly started. In Heavenly, the rule was that I wrote all the songs… I'm a control freak basically. I've spent a lot of my life trying to give up being in bands. It's interesting, but I don't think we'd [do Talulah Gosh] again, though it probably would be quite a thing.

As told to Ian Harrison

The Catenary Wires' new album Birling Gap is out on June 18, and is reviewed on p88.

"We found a note saying: Please Don't Practise Here Again."
AMELIA FLETCHER

World's ending: late on, with Eithne Farry (centre); Amelia today (left).

Camera Press/Steve Double, Courtesy Amelia Fletcher (2)

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